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THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

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THE PLACE OF MIRACLES IN THE GOSPEL HISTORY

By Rev. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

THE PLACE OF MIRACLES IN THE GOSPEL HISTORY

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory: and his disciples believed on him." —JOHN ii. 11.

I.

"AND His disciples believed on Him." These words bring home to us vividly the contrast between ancient and modern ideas of miracles. To the present day *savant*, "miracle," in the words of Matthew Arnold, "spells monster"; it is an outrage on the intelligence to be asked to believe in such a thing, therefore it is a serious hindrance to faith. To the disciple who had seen the Lord perform most of His "wonderful works," a miracle was something that arrested the attention, bore witness to the unseen order, spoke of a divine presence and love, and "manifested the glory" of the Redeemer. The beginning of miracles to the modern inquirer is the beginning of difficulties; to the first century believer,

and to all believers who can reach the same point of view, it was the beginning of faith. How to bridge this wide chasm? That is our problem in this discourse.

To reach a right standpoint in this question is no mere exercise of curiosity: it is a vital matter. Ultimately, it results in one of two alternatives—*the acceptance or rejection of historical Christianity.* To eliminate miracles from the Gospel record is to lose the record as history altogether. For the miraculous character of this record pervades it throughout, and is found in every written and traditional source embodied in the Gospels. "The simplest, probably the earliest, Gospel (that of St Mark) is, if anything, fuller of miracles than the others; the latest and most profound record of Christ's teaching lays the greatest stress upon the 'signs' which accompanied it. Again, it has often been pointed out that our Lord's teaching is closely bound up with His miracles. But it is not, I think, so commonly noticed that the miracles not only illustrate and explain the teaching, but are inseparable elements in our conception of the character of Christ. . . . His example, which has been the mainspring of a moral revolution in the world, consists chiefly of miraculous works." * A non-miraculous Christ is substantially a mythical Christ. True, there are many devout believers in Him who reject the miraculous, and retain enough of the buoyancy of their early faith, enough of the faculty of spiritual communion with the source of all blessing, to attain a high level of spiritual life. The shipwrecked

* *The Place of Miracles in Religion*, the Hulsean Lecture for 1891, by the Bishop of Southampton, pp. 43, 44.

mariners in the Acts managed to escape to land, "some on boards, some on broken pieces of the ship," but this did not mean that the ship had not become a total wreck. Nor does the frequent exhibition of a vital faith in men who have lost all belief in miracles prove that their attitude on this question is the right one. All history goes to prove that the miracles are an essential factor in Christianity, and that in the long run it stands or falls with the acceptance of the miraculous elements so intricately interwoven with its historical origins. Is it hard to believe in the miraculous? It is much harder to construct a credible Christianity without it. If once you set it aside you are forced to the belief that the most beneficent influence in history, which has been the pioneer and safeguard of civilisation in every progressive land, is the result of a bundle of myths. To hold that view is surely to manifest no little credulity. Thus a right attitude towards the evangelic miracles goes to the root of faith in Christianity.

Let us take this "beginning of miracles in Cana of Galilee" as a test case.

The scene is of the simplest. There is nothing in the occasion to suggest any call for the exercise of miraculous power; nothing dramatic, nor even out of the way in the circumstances. It is a village wedding, to which Jesus and His disciples were invited, as the incident shows, as accidental or supernumerary guests. Who the young people were we do not know, nor the name of the master of the feast, nor the relationships of the parties present. But when we look carefully into the situation, we find here a singularly happy instance of the *kind* of miracle that Jesus loved to

perform. And by way of putting it to the test, we will apply to it the four words used in the New Testament to describe our Lord's miracles on various occasions, all of which contribute something to the total impression made by them on a devout mind.

II.

1. *The first of these words is* τέρας, "*teras*," *a wonderful thing* (Acts ii 22).

This was the first impression made by any miraculous deed of Jesus Christ. It was a wonderful, inexplicable, arresting act. But while this element of wonder was always present, and must remain after all is said that can be said in explanation, it is peculiarly unfortunate that it should still dominate the minds of so many in their approach to the subject. That all miracles must of necessity be wonderful, baffling occurrences is unquestionable. They would not be miracles if it were not so; for a miracle that could be explained would be no miracle at all, being by the explanation removed out of the class of miracles into that of "ordinary" events. But this is only one of the less essential features of miracles; it does not go to the heart of the question. So far there is nothing to distinguish a genuine miracle from a mere act of magic or legerdemain. An Indian juggler does wonderful, inexplicable things, but we do not call them miracles. If miracles meant no more than the satisfaction of the instinct for wonder, they would deserve

the phrase applied to them by Matthew Arnold—that *miracle* spells *monster*.*

Nor would Jesus permit Himself to be approached as a mere wonder-worker. He was constantly appealed to, to do something extraordinary, to work portents, to give that kind of "sign" which in the popular mind was a proof and credential of a divine mission. He never refused to give His help to the needy, or to do wonderful things in order to lift a heavy burden, or remove a source of sorrow or pain, because His method of doing so created amazement. But to the mere lover of sensation, Jesus turned an uncompromising countenance. "This generation seeketh a sign, and a sign shall not be given to it." Huxley's remark that Jesus is exhibited in the second Gospel as a wonder-worker and exorcist of the first order, is therefore peculiarly unfortunate and untrue, and Renan's sneer that "Jesus had to choose between these two alternatives, either to renounce His mission or become a wonder-worker," shows an extraordinary lack of insight as an exegete. At the same time the

* It is, indeed, noteworthy and suggestive, that this word is nowhere applied to our Lord's miracles by the Evangelists, and only once in the Acts, in Peter's address on the day of Pentecost (ii. 22), and that where it occurs in the Gospels, it is always used in a disparaging sense, as chiefly applicable to the deeds of "false Christ" (Matthew xxii. 24; Mark xiii. 22), and to the kind of miracles Jesus was expected to perform by the common multitude (John iv. 48). This in itself implies that in the Evangelists' view, our Lord's miracles, while certainly calculated to excite wonder (Matthew xv. 31; Mark vi. 51; Luke iv. 22, etc.), were not mere *terata*, or portents, such as the performances of magicians would be. They were wonderful works, which on closer examination were also something of a much higher order.

extraordinary character of our Lord's miracles performed one important function—they drew men's attention to Him, a fact which He instantly used to turn their minds to the higher aspects of His work.

Note how this was so here. Jesus came with His disciples to a wedding, an unknown and unnoticed man. There was another master to this feast; Jesus was just one of the happy crowd; no one paid any particular attention to Him, except possibly as an interesting, attractive figure, or a coming personality, whose reputation was beginning to be known to a few discerning people. "There standeth one among you whom ye know not."

"You might have come to this feast," Professor Rendel Harris writes in a charming study of this incident, "and marked all the notables, from far and near; He would not be of them; this one is the bridegroom of the day; this is the bride's father and mother, and this the ruler of the feast; and this, an anonymous stranger, one of the Nazareth party; we have not seen Him in these parts before." But now "the action of the drama consists in making this anonymous party central; in changing the head of the table, or, as John puts it, in manifesting the glory of the Son"; and now it is the old feastmaster who becomes anonymous; those "who came to the feast like Substance depart like Shadows, when there has begun in the hearts of the disciples the whisper of a new Bridegroom and of a new Bride. Their places become vacant, their crowns are fading, their cups are empty. They owed it to Christ that they ever passed into history; and when they pass, they become anonymous, while their stray guest has

acquired a name above every name. Behold the Bridegroom"* who calls the world to God's feast of truth, and love, and everlasting life! "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory: and His disciples believed on Him." The miracle had issued in something more than a thrill of astonishment; through the open door of wonder walked in the vestal virgin, Faith.

2. *The second word used in the New Testament for miracle is* δύνᾶμις, "*dunamis*," *a power* (Luke iv. 36; v. 17).

That is, it was a manifestation of power more than human. It was an influx into the order of nature of the supernatural that lies behind and above nature. It is an entire fallacy to represent miracles as a *violation* of natural law, unless we call that a violation of a law which means its modification or control by a higher law. If by an act of will I raise my arm, I am not thereby violating the law of gravitation, but I am reversing the tendency of my arm to hang down, by the exercise of a higher law—the law of intelligent effort. And just as such a movement, if made, for instance, with a view of warding off a blow dealt by a brutal ruffian at a little child, would be an interference with him, though no violation of any natural law, so when the "power" of God was "present to heal" the sick through Jesus, it was an interference with the forces of disease, and yet no law of nature would be in the least violated. In both cases the action of the lower law would be modified by that of the higher; the physical forces of nature would be controlled by the intelligent and moral forces of the spiritual world.

* *Union with God* (pp. 10, 11, 12), by J. Rendel Harris, M.A.

"Miracles, then, are on the lines of God's general government of the world, in that they exemplify the triumph of man over nature; also of the victory of good over evil. The forces which miracles defeat are the forces of evil, disease, and death, and sin; the miraculous power is exerted on the side of God, and this constitutes the test of such powers." "If I, by the power of God, cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you." * It is from this point of view that an answer is to be found to those who think they do God honour in depreciating the Gospel miracles by speaking of "the perpetual miracle of the Universe." Professor Max Müller, in an interview published some years before his death, put the case thus: "Everything in this world is supernatural. If we consider how we came here, what we are, and what we are meant for, surely there is enough to be astonished at and to call wonderful. Why should we crave for little miracles? The *mira*, the real wonders, are always there, but we do not see them; so we make for ourselves little miracles." † True, all

* *The Place of Miracles in Religion.*

† It is unfortunate that the word "miracle" ("little wonder") has, through the Latin Vulgate, passed into our language to represent a Greek word meaning *signum*, a "sign." "Superstition," as Dr Abbott puts it, "had already entered the Church to misinterpret the Scriptures and degrade primitive Christianity, and the influence of this degradation is seen in the translation in the fourth century of a Greek word meaning *sign* by a Latin word meaning *marvel*. The Greek word marvel (*thauma*) is never used in the New Testament to designate what we call miracles. They are never regarded as mere marvels [*see* above]. The very word *miracle* is a verbal infelicity—an inheritance from a corrupt epoch, bringing with it a corruption of Christian simplicity" (*The Theology of an Evolutionist*, pp. 130-1).

nature is a miracle in the same sense that we cannot account for the origin of the simplest natural fact on "natural" grounds. But nature is not a miracle in the sense of the New Testament miracles. It is, at least to the scientific vision, a sealed order; its sum total of energy remains ever the same; there no addition possible, no subtraction possible; the whole is a closed circle. This is the modern scientific conception of nature, and it is here that the Christian thinker parts company with the scientist, since the latter leaves no room for a divine will in a personal, active sense, and makes God a metaphysical abstraction, an empty name. For this is the death of all religion in the Christian sense. But once you reach the truth everywhere emphasised in the Bible that God is a real, free, active Personality, that He is continually acting on and through the works of His hands, and that He manifests His power in ways that can never be tabulated under the categories of Natural Law — you come to a new conception of everything. Nature is then open on the Godward side to the influx of fresh energies when these are required for any great purpose, as in the great Providential movements of history, and in the efflorescence of the miraculous at the beginning of the Christian era. The scientist may be shocked because there are so many religious thinkers who find it possible to believe that Jesus on a particular occasion turned certain water-pots into wine-jars; but that need not disturb us if it brings us a nearer and warmer sense of the beneficent power of God, who made both wine and water, and is therefore able, if He has a great spiritual purpose to serve, to turn the one into

the other without waiting for the usual processes of nature to take place.

3. *The third word used in the New Testament to denote a miracle is ἔργον, "ergon," a work* (Matthew xi. 2; John v. 20; x. 32, etc.).

That is to say, it represents a marvellous deed revealing supernatural power with some inherent moral significance in it. It is not a mere wonder, it is more than an arbitrary exhibition of power, it aims at some beneficent end. In the Temptation-vision the Devil calls on Jesus to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple on the ground, that God's angels would "bear Him up"; thus would all men be convinced that He was the Son of God. Jesus refuses. It was a vow as well as a refusal, meaning that He would never seek for opportunities either to strike wonder into people's minds, or to use His supernatural power for the sake of doing so. For that would be a "marvel," and it would be a "power," but it would not be a "work"—a deed having moral significance. On the contrary, all His miracles, as here, arose out of definite circumstances, they all had an end to prove, of kindness, of witness to a truth, of physical or spiritual redemption, they were not mere portents; they were "works of God" (John ix. 3). This, indeed, is His favourite way of speaking of His miracles. "But the witness that I have is greater than that of John, for the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (John v. 36). These miracles of His were *works*; they aimed at and accomplished something, and

that something included a spiritual as well as a physical end.

4. *The fourth and final word used for miracles in the New Testament is* σημεῖον, "*semeion*," *a sign or symbol.*

All the miracles of Jesus are mystical acts; they are a revelation of character as well as power. They are priceless to us, not because they are wonderful works merely, but because they are a part of the revelation of the Gospel—a revelation of the heart of God. This is what Jesus means when He appeals to the witness of the miracles. Through them we see as through a crystal window a rich picture of the love, and pity, and forgiveness of the Father of lights.

Matthew Arnold poured contempt on the idea that miracles could have evidential value. He says, "If I could change this pen with which I write into a penwiper, would that prove that what I write is true?" No, of course not; for such an act would, if it were possible, be a mere exercise of magic. It would be a "wonder," it would be a "power"; but it would not be a "work," nor a "sign." For it would tell us nothing of the character of the one who wrought it; and therefore it would not be a miracle in the New Testament sense. These wonderful works of Christ are signs, not indeed of mere supernatural power—that was the kind of sign demanded by the people of His day, who would possibly be convinced by the transformation of a pen into a penwiper—but a sign of supernatural power embodying an act of divine love and grace, and by these signs Jesus was constantly giving beautiful and generous manifestations.

When, for instance, Jesus turned water into wine,

and fed the five thousand with five loaves and two small fishes, it was a sign that God is not fettered by the processes of nature, but can hasten them if He chooses; when He stilled the storm on the lake, it was a sign that God rules all storms and holds the winds in His fists; when He cured disease, it was a sign that health is the normal state of humanity, and that pain, and weakness, and suffering, are but passing phases of life, the result of sin, and to be done away with where sin has been forgiven and eliminated out of creation; when He raises the dead son and daughter and brother, and restores them to their friends, it is a sign that in Him, at least, all loving and God-fearing circles of love, broken on earth, will be reunited in heaven; when He cures the mad, and heals the possessed of devils, it is a sign that the kingdom of evil exists on sufferance, and that in the end Satan will be seen as lightning falling from heaven; when He Himself is raised from the dead, God having loosened the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of it, it was a sign that He was Lord of life, and that those found in Him at last can never die, but walk eternally "in the light of life." All these great works point to eternal realities, and so, though they may since have ceased so far as we know, though it is foolish and illogical to deny that true miracles may occasionally happen still—they have a precious meaning to us, for they are "signs" of permanent realities, they are manifestations of the divine character, they "show forth the glory of the Son."

These four words, then, — "wonder," "power," "work," "sign,"—give us the true characteristics of a

miracle. They supply a test which marks out the miracles of the Gospel from all others, and give them a place by themselves. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus at Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory: and His disciples believed on Him." What led them to faith hinders ours. Does not this show that we have missed something in these stories which is vital? And does it not show that we need the help of God's spirit, in order that we may see them in their meaning and beauty? If we are not brought to believe in the Son by these beautiful works, which seem so "monstrous" to some of us, but were sweetly natural to Him, is it not an indication that our standpoint is somehow wrong—that we are still outside the happy circle in which those move who are possessed of faith as well as reason, and grand humility as well as a hunger for "truth as it is in Jesus"? "*Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.*"

THE WATER MADE WINE

By Rev. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

THE WATER MADE WINE

The Beginning of Miracles

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him."—JOHN ii. 11.

THE first miracle which Jesus wrought was done at a wedding feast, the happiest occasion of human life. The last miracle which this evangelist tells us of, was done by the graveside, the place which above all others, is associated with human sadness and heartbreak. And on both occasions, as if to prove that this was His great thought in coming into the world, on both occasions His presence and power brought joy—joy to the guests at a merry-making, joy to the mourners who were sighing and bleeding from the sorest wound of all. Between these two scenes there were a hundred others in which Jesus was found—grave and gay, uneventful and exciting, scenes of ordinary life, and scenes coloured with romance, scenes of pathos and scenes of tragedy, scenes as varied as the ever-changing experience of human life. That short ministry of His seemed to touch every condition of man. It appealed to every age and every class

and every lot. Its hand was laid on every key of the great manifold human organ, and every touch evoked some music.

We see Him among children and young men and the aged. He is often with the poor and not seldom with the rich. He feasts with Pharisees and rulers, and just as readily with publicans and sinners. We hear of Him constantly among the sick, crippled, and maimed, and He does not forget to feed the hungry. He discourses with young men about their ambitions, and with broken-down men about their despairs. He debates with the learned, and talks with the ignorant woman by the well. We see Him once in a king's court, and we see Him often with beggars. He has to do with merchants driving their bargains, with fishermen at their perilous toil, with ploughmen and sowers working in the field, with women as they sweep the house and prepare the meals. We meet Him in synagogue and temple, in palace and cottage, in street procession and lonely retreat. We see Him glorified as a King, adored as God, scourged as a prisoner, condemned and crucified as a criminal. What a strange panorama it is! All the phases and shapes of human life are in that story. It seems as if He had purposely brought Himself into contact with every human experience and relationship that He might show His interest and sympathy with them all, that He might bring His healing and sanctifying power to bear upon them all, and prove that His mission was to redeem and glorify them all. And every line of His ministry bears witness that there is nothing in our lives, and nothing which affects man, that is outside the range of

His influence. Now let us look for a moment on this familiar and homely scene in which He did His first wonderful work, and manifested forth His glory. This was absolutely His first miracle, done with a distinct purpose, not accidentally, because He happened to be placed in circumstances which called for His interposition, but with forethought, and advisedly, that by His first work He might sketch in outline and foreshadow the whole character of His ministry. It was a sort of prophetic picture of the work which His presence and power were to accomplish in the world at large. Here, then, first we have

I.

Christ commencing His redeeming work in an atmosphere of joy.

This is the overture of the concert, the keynote of all the music which is to follow. There the first gleams of His glory were seen shining on the faces of the bridegroom and bride, and of the happy guests who surrounded them. There, in that one scene on earth, where human cares and sorrows and burdens are most forgotten, where human hopes reach their highest point and human bliss is realised in as much perfection as earthly things know, there did the Divine One bring His smile, sanction, blessing, and wonder-working power.

That opening should never be forgotten, for it

spreads its tender glad colouring over all the rest. The Evangelist who gave us this incident, knew the Master better than all the others, and read with clearer eyes the deep secret of His thoughts and purpose. And here we are told that He who came to heal all sorrows introduced Himself with the sunny gladness of one who could enter into all pure joys. He who had often to say afterwards, "Blessed are the mourners," began by saying, "Blessed are the glad." He commenced His ministry where joy abounded, because He had come to make joy abound everywhere, because He had come charged with the joy of God to spread it everywhere. The wedding feast typified His purpose; for was it not to marry heaven to earth that they might be one in sympathy, hope, labour, and blessedness? The joy-giving element was never absent. If He walked through darkness, it was to change it into light; if He endured sorrow, it was to overcome and banish it; if He suffered death, it was to destroy death. Joy was the end of it all, as it was the beginning. We were made for joy because God made us. Sorrow is but the stranger that tarries for the night, joy the guest that we should entertain always. Jesus would not have been the all-round Saviour of men if He had struck the keynote of His ministry on a mournful chord. Our own nature is keyed to joy through all its wild wails of sorrow; we thirst and pant for gladness and delight, music and beauty. And the religion which meets us at every point is that which comes as a sympathetic, tearful angel to soothe us in the bitter hours of grief, and as a smiling, approving angel to bless and sanction our joys, to

purify and elevate them, and touch them with the colours of a heavenly clime.

Christ opens His ministry by taking charge of the innocent delight of men that He may redeem them from coarseness and sin.

II.

Again, in that first act, we have Christ pronouncing His benediction on the sweetest and dearest of human relationships.

Blessing wedded life, and laying His consecrating hand upon the life of home and family, His presence there made the wedding indeed a sacrament. It was a holy thing in His eyes, and beautiful, this union of two hearts in the sight of God, pledged in deathless love, pledged to be one in all labours, joys, and sorrows. And there is hardly a diviner thing on earth, and no greater solemnity than this joining of two souls for better or worse, provided that they are joined in honest, truthful, thoughtful love; joined in *such* a way, with such reverence, with such fitness for one another, with such regard for their obligations, that God will recognise the union in heaven. It is not surprising that Christ's first public work was to give His witness of approval to that beautiful solemnity. For the making of family life is the making or marring of the world. From the vows uttered at the altar all good comes, and, alas, if they are foolishly uttered, much misery and much sin. Honest and religious love is

the source of all that is pure, noble, inspiring, and great; thoughtless and guilty love is the mother of half the world's miseries. Humanity is shaped by the home life. Its influences permeate all things. He who would redeem the world must begin by redeeming the family. No wonder, then, that He whose thoughts were so large and far-seeing commenced His work there, in recognising and blessing that most divine and most momentous of all earthly relationships. If you cannot have Christ with you at the wedding, and in the home life after the wedding, you had far better not undertake that business at all.

III.

That first miracle shows us Christ as the comforter and healer in the smaller troubles and passing things of life.

He dealt with heartbreak enough before He had finished His course, with diseases and griefs and despairs which were terrible to behold. He went down to the lowest depths of human agony to make His saving power felt. But here there was nothing very terrible, nothing urgent, no awful pain or crying want, pleading piteously for His intervention. It was only that something had been forgotten which the guests might have done without by an effort. Some one had blundered. A tradesman had neglected to send the wine, or the bridegroom had forgotten to order it. No wonder! a bridegroom may be forgiven

a thousand omissions in the pre-occupation and absorbing interests of the coming event. It was not much; but it was about to cause no little irritation and real pain and humiliation to the bridegroom, shame to the bride, a feeling of sympathetic unrest and vexation among all the guests. It would just spoil the feast. And the Saviour's heart was moved as if some big agony had been appealing to Him. He had come to smooth the ruffles, and allay the irritations of life, as well as to lighten its deep darkness and fill up its awful abysses. And there He wrought His first miracle to save a happy company from a passing shadow of shame and disappointment. He has been doing that ever since. His sympathy is equal to the greatest demands, and just as prompt in responding to all lighter calls. His religion extracts the sting from the fiercest and deadliest sorrows, and smoothes the mere surface wounds of daily irritations. He helps us to bear life's frets and pricking cares as well as life's burning fevers and desperate agonies. Nay, were it not so, He would be of little use to us in nine-tenths of life, for life is mainly made up on its trying side of just such ordinary worries, disappointments, and vexations as those which He removed at that wedding feast. He did many a greater thing than that, but perhaps not one that showed more clearly what His religion was to be to those who felt its power through all ages to come. You see Him there as He always is, removing this weight of daily care, turning to music the jarring notes of life.

IV.

And lastly, this first miracle was symbolic in the broadest sense of that transforming power which Christ has always been putting forth upon the common things of life.

He touches the then tasteless water, and it comes out rich, gladdening wine. I say nothing about the nature of the wine. God forbid that I should mar this simple talk by a discussion which would only disturb, and perhaps embitter, some minds. The Saviour at least deemed *that* wine, whatever it was, much better than water. And the thought is that He changed what was insipid, and commonplace, and without flavour, into something sweet, and exhilarating, and joy-giving. And nothing could better set forth His work in the world, and in human hearts. Life is largely made up of things which become to us eventually much like water. They are necessary things, as water is. And if we had them not we should die for want of them. But we have them so much with us, they are so constant a part of our daily experience, that they are apt to become tasteless, dull, unattractive, unwelcome. The very affections of life, with many, lose the keen raptures which they once brought, and become a little stale; and nine-tenths of the labours of life settle down into unexciting routine and even drudgery; and the earth we tread, beautiful as it is, loses its charm in the eyes of those who have

looked on it too often ; and pleasures lose all their relish in time, and life itself towards the end thins down until people say it is as tasteless as water.

Ah, yes, but never where Christ's transforming touch has been. He changes the water into wine. The earth is always beautiful to them that love Him, and human affections, always deep and with something of heaven in them, and the joy of the heart always renewed, and the very routine of labour is relieved as when one steps to music, and upon all thought, and scenes, and faces, something of the glory shines which was on the wedding guests that day. There is nothing quite the same where He is present. The water jars are filled with wine, and the best is always kept to the last. And thus may we prove the beginning of miracles in ourselves.

THE HEALING OF THE NOBLEMAN'S SON

Three Stages of Faith in Jesus Christ

By Rev. ALBERT GOODRICH, D.D.

THE HEALING OF THE NOBLEMAN'S SON

Three Stages of Faith in Jesus Christ

John iv. 46-54.

We have in this miracle of the healing of the son of the nobleman, or king's officer, an example of the growth of faith. The chief interest of the miracle in the mind of Jesus Christ, was plainly not so much the healing of the boy—there was no difficulty about that—as the inspiring of the boy's father with a true faith. The first word to the father's request given by Jesus was, not a direct answer, but, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will in no wise believe. It is your faith I want; that is far more difficult for Me to get than it is for Me to heal the boy. I see your faith will never come without seeing signs and wonders." Jesus Christ works the miracle primarily to work faith on the father and his household.

There are here three stages of faith in Jesus Christ. First, faith in Christ's reputation; second, in Christ's word; and third, in Christ Himself.

I.

The nobleman began with faith in the reputation of Jesus as a great worker of miracles.

The fame of Jesus turning water into wine, and of His healings of the sick, had travelled. The nobleman had heard of these miracles. His son was sick ; perhaps this Jesus would heal him. He would make the journey to Him and ask. He was evidently an affectionate father, an honest, sensible man, howbeit far from the fine sensibility and lowly thoughtful heart of the Centurion, whose servant was sick. The Centurion had faith in Christ. To Christ's word to him, " I will come and heal him," the Centurion said, " Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof ; but speak the word only and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority having others under me : and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth ; and to another, Come, and he cometh." The nobleman was not like the Centurion, a man of thought. It never occurred to him that Jesus was Master over the spiritual forces of nature, as is an officer over his soldiers. He did not think at all about these high matters. As for his house, why should Jesus not come down to it? It was not very near, but Jesus could not, he thought, work the miracle without coming. He was as worthy as others that He should come under his roof. A common, ordinary soul was this nobleman, kindly, within limits sensible, but very far from the spiritual quality of that Centurion.

There are souls who hunger for righteousness and thirst for God, who are quick to discern the truth, who turn from vanity and lies, and when overtaken in sin are distressed. Such souls respond to Jesus, they perceive straightway His truth and beauty. They want no sign and wonder; they trust Him at once. But there are others, not evil but secular, preferring, almost unconsciously, self and the world to God and Christ; they are not troubled with any hunger for righteousness or thirst for God. They fall in with the ideas and customs they find about them. They look not, long not, for any consolation of Israel. But some trouble comes, their son, their dear little boy, is hopelessly ill. Human skill has done its utmost without effect. They are distressed, they are at their wits' end. They begin to remember there is a God, and that He can do wonders; so they have heard. They will pray, "Lord, come down and heal my son." They are driven, as this nobleman, by outward need, not pressed by inward desire, unto God. Or they themselves fall very sick, they lose all interest in business and in pleasure, they care no more how the world wags; or reverses overtake them, their plans are broken and their hopes fail, they are much perplexed and distressed; or a great fear falls upon them for some evil they have done—they are dark, apprehensive, wretched. In these circumstances they hear of or remember the wonders Jesus has wrought. They call upon Him for help. They pray Him to come down and help them. They have not very clear ideas or distinct faith, but (so they say) they have no one else to call upon, they can do no other, all else in which they put their trust has failed, and now they

will try Him. Like this nobleman, they are pressed to Jesus by outward need, not by inward longing; driven to Him by some outward trouble, not drawn to Him by the vision of His truth and love. They come to Him rather in desperation than in trustfulness. They come for some outward relief rather than for spiritual blessing. They just believe what they have heard about Jesus, a poor crediting of hearsay, enough, in their extremity, to move them to give Christ a trial.

This faith does not honour Jesus: how does He receive it? With great grace. He first gives it a gentle rebuke, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe. Except I heal this boy of yours, your crediting My reputation will never pass into believing My word or Me Myself; except I bring you out of this illness, or make good your reverses, or relieve you in your misery; except ye see the signs and wonders of good health, of good wages or income, of regular work or steady prosperity, of old age pensions or a fortune, ye will in no wise believe." The nobleman was not conscious that this was his position, but Christ saw that such was his position. So, brethren, though many of us are not conscious of it, it is here, "Except ye see signs and wonders, deliverances and prosperities, ye will not believe."

Does Christ grant this tacit demand? Not in all cases. For to give, as a rule, signs and wonders, gifts and grants, plenty and pleasure, would not win faith. It would not make spiritual men and women, it would not expel the love of self and the dependence on the material; on the contrary, it would minister to them; it would make mere partisans, retainers, hypocrites, not strong, righteous persons; it would make a

party, not a Church. Was the nobleman offended at the rebuke he received? Possibly he did not altogether understand it. He was moved to make a more urgent and affectionate appeal. "Sir, come down, ere my child, my little boy, die." Personal contact with the Lord had plainly quickened his feeling both for Christ and for the boy. There was something to work upon in this nobleman. He was not proud and haughty, hard and wrathful, or he would not so respectfully and earnestly have answered. His faith in Christ may be won. Therefore, Christ said to him, "Go thy way, thy son liveth." "The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, and he went his way."

II.

Here, then, distinctly emerges the second stage of his faith.

His faith has passed from a reckoning on Christ's general reputation to a trusting Christ's definite word. He trusted it completely, for he certainly was full of peace as he went down from the high land about Cana to Capernaum.

I knew a man in mid-life who had come to know that he had an internal growth, which in a few weeks would end fatally. He was greatly troubled in mind about his wife and young family. He had not been able to make much provision for them. He was a good man. One morning, with sad, apprehensive thoughts, he looked out of his window. He saw some sparrows with evident delight picking up some

crumbs. The word came into his heart with divinely persuasive tones, "Behold the birds of the heavens, that they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns, and your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Be not, therefore, anxious for the morrow." "The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him." He thereafter had no anxiety. And God did take care of that wife and family.

At times the faith of the strongest needs a definite word of the Lord to stay itself upon. You may remember the case of the great Bishop Butler. Nearing his death, he said, "The consciousness of my perpetual infirmities makes me afraid to die." "My lord," said the chaplain, "you have forgotten that Jesus Christ is a Saviour." "True," was the answer, "but how shall I know that He is a Saviour for me?" "My lord, it is written, Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." "True," said the Bishop, "and I am surprised that though I have read that Scripture a thousand times over, I never felt its virtue till this moment; and now I die happy."—"The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him."

I knew of one, feeling he must do something, work this or that, ere he could be accepted, hearing the word: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent," and believing it, he straightway enjoyed complete rest. "The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him."

Paul tells us that he could not bear patiently the thorn in the flesh until the word of the Lord came to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee." And how many since have found this word a resting-place for their soul.

Our being here present, brethren, is proof that we have the first stage of faith, that of giving credence to the general report about Jesus; but has His word come to us definitely, and have we believed it? Have we this second stage of faith? "He that believeth not is condemned already"; do we believe that word? "Men ought always to pray and not to faint"; do we believe that word? "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand"; "I am come that ye might have life and might have it more abundantly"; do we believe these words? It is good to treasure the memory with the words of Christ, that they may in our hour of need present themselves for our faith. The men believed the word that Jesus spake unto them.

III.

Going home and inquiring the hour when the fever left his son, the nobleman knew it was at that hour in which Jesus said unto him, "Thy son liveth." "And himself believed, and his whole house."

Believed—nothing is added as the object of his faith. What now did he believe? He believed fully, altogether, in Jesus; not simply His word, but Him Himself. He believed in His person and mission; he believed He was the Son of God, the Messiah, the Founder of God's kingdom upon the earth, the Saviour of the world. He believed comprehensively, utterly, in Jesus Christ. He became

in that faith fully devoted to Him. Such was his faith, that it infected his whole household. Doubtless, he told them all, and told them with such glowing faith that they too believed. It is said that this nobleman was Chuza, Herod's steward, whose wife was among the holy women who administered unto the Lord of their substance. "And he believed, and his whole house."

Have we, brethren, passed on from the first stage of faith, that of general credence, to the second, that of recumbency or leaning upon the definite word? and from that on to this third stage, that of going beyond the word to the Person who speaks, and trusting Him Himself? Are we believing with all our heart, without shadow of doubt, that He is the Son of God, the Divine Saviour of our soul and of the whole world? Such faith is secure against critical attacks upon mere words or narratives. It knows Him as the living, working Jesus Christ. It knows His mind and will, and does not need express word to make them known. It knows His purpose and power, and needs not specific command or great persuasion unto Christian gift and work. Such faith is contagious, it infects others, our children, our household, our neighbours. Oh! that we all had such faith. We come to it only through knowledge of and positive trusting of the word of Jesus, and the consequent experience of His divine, gracious power. "And himself believed, and his whole house."

THE FIRST MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES

By Rev. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.

THE FIRST MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES

LUKE v. 1-11.

THREE stages at least in the call of the principal Apostles are now generally recognised.

The first occurred during the Judæan ministry, when John, Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel were attracted to the Lord, and came forward as His disciples (John i. 35-51). At this period, however, they would seem to have been only occasional followers, and, when not actually with Jesus, continued to carry on their former occupations.

The second stage was reached, at least in the case of the fisher-group of disciples, when by the shores of the Sea of Galilee Jesus summoned Peter and Andrew, James and John, to come after Him, that He might make them fishers of men: and they left all and followed Him (Matt. iv. 18-22; Mark i. 16-20). Their whole lives and interests were henceforth devoted to Christ's service, and gradually they were prepared for the highest call of all, the call to Apostleship.

That came when, out of the great mass of His disciples, Jesus chose the Twelve, "that they might be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach, and to have authority to cast out devils" (Mark iii. 14, 15). The foundations of the new Church were

then securely laid, and in these humble men the Saviour had provided the means for the carrying on of His work, after He Himself had left the world.

It is with the second of these three stages that the narrative before us is evidently most closely connected, but it is not easy to determine its precise relation to it. Certain differences between the accounts of St Matthew and St Mark on the one hand, and of St Luke on the other, notably the entire omission by the former Evangelists of any reference to the miraculous draught of fishes, have led many scholars to imagine that St Luke is, in reality, describing another and supplementary call addressed specially to Peter, but which embraced also some of his companions. And, in itself, there is nothing improbable in this. At the same time the general similarity between the narratives, including the recurrence of certain marked words and phrases, makes it more probable that the occasions to which they refer are to be identified, and that while St Matthew and St Mark describe the actual circumstances of the call itself in fuller detail, St Luke includes more particularly certain incidents leading up to it.*

* It should be hardly necessary to point out that there is no ground for the position taken up by certain German scholars that in the Lucan narrative we have a confused recollection of the call of Peter mixed up with the history of the miraculous draught of fishes that accompanied his reinstatement in his apostolic office, and which is recorded in John xxi. 1-14. The two narratives, as St Augustine showed long ago, are quite distinct. And why should there not have been two miracles of a similar kind, "one granted to emphasise and illustrate the call, the other the re-call, of the chief Apostle"? See Plummer, *Commentary on St Luke*, p. 147; and Westcott, *Gospel of St John*, p. 301.

If so, the course of events would seem to have been somewhat as follows. After being rejected at Nazareth, Jesus directed His steps towards Capernaum, preaching in various of the towns and villages on the way. In consequence, His fame as a preacher rapidly spread, and when He arrived at the populous district immediately surrounding the Lake of Gennesaret, He at once found Himself the centre of an eager and enthusiastic crowd. So closely indeed did they press upon Him on one occasion as He stood by the shores of the Lake, that He had to take refuge in one of the boats, which the fishermen had left, while they washed their nets. Entering into this, He bade its owner Simon push off a little from the land, and then, using the prow as a pulpit, He sat down and taught the multitudes gathered on the shore.

Of Jesus' sermon on this occasion we have no account, but no sooner was it concluded than we read of a miraculous deed which followed it, and which was evidently intended for the instruction not so much of the multitudes as of the disciples. Anxious as ever to turn every opportunity to its highest use, the Saviour resolved to impress upon His followers the nature of the work to which they were called, and the conditions of its success, in a way that they would never forget. And so, turning to Simon who had apparently been with Him all the time in the boat, steering, and keeping it in its proper position, He bade him, "Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." "Master," at once replied the disciple, using a term which is found only in St Luke's Gospel, and which implies the right of the person so

addressed to give orders, "we toiled all night, and took nothing"—we employed the whole of the best time for fishing in fruitless labour: "but at Thy word"—or, more literally, "relying on Thy word," "on the strength of Thy word"—"I will let down the nets." Short as had been his intercourse hitherto with Jesus, Peter had already become so convinced of his new Master's wisdom and power, that he was prepared to act at once upon His word, however it might run contrarily to his own experience as a fisherman. And the venture of his faith was rewarded. For no sooner had the nets been lowered than "they enclosed a great multitude of fishes; and their nets were breaking." Anxious to lose nothing of the marvellous catch that had thus been granted them—and the instinct of work prevailing at first over the wonder at such an exhibition of miraculous power has well been claimed as one of the inimitable touches of truthfulness in the narrative—the disciples beckoned to their partners in the other boat, that they should come and help them. "And they came, and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink."

We shall see directly what was the effect of all this on the impulsive Simon, but before doing so, it may be well to notice in what the miracle consisted. It was not in the sudden and unexpected appearance of a huge shoal of fish. Such a phenomenon is well-known to fishermen everywhere, and seems to have been of frequent occurrence in the Lake of Galilee, where we are told that the density of the shoals "can scarcely be conceived by those who have not witnessed them. They sometimes cover an acre or more on the surface in one dense mass." We are not obliged,

therefore, to think of Jesus as actually creating the fish at the moment. Indeed, as one commentator (Dr Plummer) notices, "In no miracle before the Resurrection does Jesus create; and we have no sufficient reason for believing that the food provided at the second miraculous draught of fishes was created (John xxi. 9-13)." It is probably enough, then, on the present occasion, that through His divine omniscience Jesus knew that the fish were there, though it may well have been that, as Lord not only of the human race but of nature, under whose feet have been placed "the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas" (Psalm viii. 8) He actually, by the free exercise of His will, attracted them to the spot.

But in any case, whatever the precise nature of our Lord's working, there can be no doubt that the whole occurrence was regarded by the disciples themselves as a real miracle. Trained fishermen as they were, they saw in this marvellous draught following on their own past failure, and as the direct result of their obedience to a word from Christ, an exhibition of more than human power. Astonishment seized upon them. And Simon Peter was only giving expression to the feeling that was shared by all alike when he fell down at Jesus' knees with the cry, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

These words, again, have been cited as words which no one would ever have thought of inventing, and which bear on their face the stamp of truth. We would naturally have looked in the first instance for some expression of wonder, or of gratitude, certainly not for this deep-seated expression of sinfulness and

abasement. And yet the latter is psychologically true, and is vouched for by many similar experiences in the lives of God's people. The Israelites at Sinai, amidst the signs of Jehovah's presence, implored Moses saying, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Exodus xx. 19). Job, when the true knowledge of God was granted to him, exclaimed, "I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job xlii. 5, 6). Isaiah, face to face with the vision of God's holiness, was conscious at first only of his own and his people's need as he cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah vi. 5). And so now with Peter. What other evidences of the presence and the power of Jesus had failed to do, this miracle, perhaps from its close connection with his own past experience as a fisherman, succeeded in effecting. The conviction was borne in upon him that in Jesus he had not only a "Master" whose orders must be obeyed, but a "Lord" of infinite purity and holiness (notice the change in his mode of address to Jesus in verses 5 and 8). And accordingly, he who afterwards could say, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee upon the waters" (Matthew xiv. 28), and who, when others were doubting, held fast by the triumphant assurance, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John vi. 68), was at this moment so overborne by the sense of his own utter unworthiness, that the very presence of Christ seemed to carry with

it a reproach and a condemnation from which he longed to be freed.

But this was only the first and necessary step towards his being raised to a new position of trust and of usefulness. To the disciple's cry, "Depart from me," came back at once the Master's reassuring answer, "Fear not." And not only so, but the nature of the work to which he was now to be called was revealed to Peter, "From henceforth thou shalt catch men," or more literally, "From henceforth thou shalt be taking men alive." Captured himself, he was to be the means of capturing others. No longer fish, but men, were to be the goal of his efforts. And he was to take them for life, and not for death. Only in the pathway of experience could Peter learn the full meaning of his new mission. But realising that a definite turning-point had come in his life, he and his companions, when they had brought their boats to land, "left all, and followed Jesus."

The extreme appropriateness of this call to the fisher-disciples has often been remarked, and it certainly affords striking evidence of the manner in which the grace of God adapts itself to the particular circumstances and needs of men. As to the Magi of the East, who were given to the study of the stars, God gave a star to guide them to Bethlehem; as to those who followed Him to Capernaum for bodily food, Christ revealed Himself as the Bread of Life, and to the woman of Samaria, come forth to draw water by the well, as the Water of Life; so "to these men in our text, accustomed to a joy and gladness when they took great store of fish, He presents His comforts agreeably to their taste, they should be

fishers still. Christ makes heaven all things to all men, that He might gain all." *

But not only was the miracle appropriate to those who first witnessed it, it still suggests to us lessons of enduring value regarding the true nature of the Church's work and mission. Thus in the disciples, wearied and worn with a night of fruitless toil, we are reminded of how vain in themselves all human efforts are; in their ready obedience to Christ's command to let down their nets, we learn that our duty is not to be measured by our own ability, but that dependence upon Christ and the humble carrying out of His will are the first conditions of spiritual service; and in the miraculous draught and the breaking nets we see the wholly unexpected success with which all faithful service will at length be crowned. "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God"—that promise and that command are writ large over the whole of the story. And only those who appropriate them to themselves can hope in any sense to be, like the disciples of old, true "fishers of men."

* From a sermon by Donne, quoted in Trench's *Notes on the Miracles*, 7th edition, p. 135, note §.

THE STILLING OF THE TEMPEST

By Rev. J. MORGAN GIBBON

THE STILLING OF THE TEMPEST

The Prayer of Unfaith

"And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm."—MATTHEW viii. 26.

"KNOW thine opportunities," said the legend above the porch of a Greek temple. It was a noble scripture, important for all, and pertinent for all time.

"Ye shall see the *heaven opened*," said Jesus, "and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Heaven *is* opened, but the art lies in seeing the angels, for

> "'Tis only when they spring to heaven that angels
> Reveal themselves to you: they sit all day
> Beside you, and lie down at night by you,
> Who care not for their presence, muse or sleep;'
> And all at once they leave you, and you know them!"

Earlier in this great day of great deeds, these scholars of Jesus had seen an angel ascending. When Jesus praised the faith of the Centurion as the finest flower of human trust, He had yet found on earth, His disciples recognised, through the sick-

ness and sorrow that had come to the Roman's home, an angel that had descended from heaven with a royal opportunity for this man; and in the Gentile's happy little speech, his manly, forthright barrack-room theology which so pleased the Master, they caught the gleam of the angel's wings as he rose with gladness to God. But when would *their* angel come? their opportunity to prove their growth in faith? Well, their angel was on the way. They had been well coached for his coming. A series of miracles had been their preparation. Now a miracle is a sign. It speaks to the eye when a parable addresses the ear. It says in action more than can be said in words. But a little way below the surface miracle and parable are the same; and, assuredly, when these men had seen Jesus heal the leper, *heard* Him heal the Centurion's son, watched Him cure the trouble in Peter's house, they ought to have attained to a clear conviction of His power and to a certain facility in the interpretation of His great language of signs.

Here, then, is their opportunity and test—this great sign of the sea. He enters a boat. They followed, a great tempest arose. The boat was covered with waves, but He was asleep on the cushion. It is an elaborately composed sea-piece. Every item teems with meaning. You and I can read its meanings at sight. We can see the angel in the storm, for it is not difficult to see other people's angels. What a chance that tempest offered! Jesus had said, "Be not anxious for your life, the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Perhaps when a very heavy sea had been shipped

and the yeasty froth fell even on the Master's form, some one, remembering what the Centurion had done, might have suggested, "Had not John better go astern and gently wake Him, and say, Master, do not trouble to rise, speak a word only, and the storm shall cease?" That would have been fine in its way, still only an imitation. It would not have been perfect. The opportunity they now had, left room for a yet nobler faith. The boat was filling. The tempest still was rising. What then? "He is asleep, and we are with Him. Earlier in the day He said, 'The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head,' but He has found a pillow. Full of faith, He sleeps in God. With equal faith let us do what men can in such a gale, but no panic, no cry. Be still and know that He who healed the leper and saved the Roman's boy will not forget His own servants! Let the storm awake Him, but we will be still. Let those keep watch whose turn it is, the others sleep as He is sleeping." What a "Well done good and faithful servants" this would draw from the waking Christ .What a flash of wings would have lit up this narrative. The angel darting upward faster than light can travel, would have entered heaven with the good tidings that the kingdom had come, and the will of God was being done on sea that night as it is done in heaven.

But no! they missed the sign. The storm burst into their souls and blew their faith away. They rushed in panic to the stern, and with clamours that rose above the howling of the wind, they cried, "Master! carest Thou not that we *perish!* Save, Lord, or we *perish!*" The great chance passed for ever. The Master rebuked His disciples, and it was with an

old, sad story that the angel of the storm was fain to return.

II.

"Lord, save us *or we perish!*" There is no other alternative. Such when faith breaks down is the hard dogmatism of despair. We see no further than that black fact of death. God must either do what we want *or* nothing avails.

But this is a terrible version of things to come from the disciples of Jesus. For on this theory all acts of saving are mere postponements. A granted prayer only puts off the evil day a little further. "If it be not now, it is to come." All gifts, providences, healings, are thus robbed of what is felt to be best in them, their promissory character, their prophetic significance. They are mere reprieves, not earnests of salvation, for we must all die some day. The world's great need is faith and hope. And all people who have lived with Christ should help the world to a faith. We Christian folk may say, "Lord, save," but never "Lord, save *or* we perish!" We must take a larger view of divine possibilities. "Perish" should have no place in Christian vocabulary. "For God so loved the world" that no one should perish but have everlasting life.

The sea and the storm are perpetual accompaniments of our earthly life, and our sign in the storm is the sleeping Christ. The inactivity of God is the favourite text of the world. "He does nothing" is the complaint, He lets the boat fill with waves. Men die in the flower of life. Hearts are broken, and He

sleeps! Vanity of Vanities! such is the sermon of the fool; but if you have known Jesus Christ, if you have beheld His sign on leprous and palsied wretches, if you know the love of God, His sleep does not trouble you. If this storm rages, it is because the time to rebuke it has not yet come. If no stupendous miracle arrests all suffering, that is because God is working out a better consummation and in a better way. He is not limited to the bare alternative that we see, and *our* faith in God should speak another language than "Save, Lord, or we perish." In Tintoretto's picture of Paradise the vast canvas is crowded with angel faces. Angels everywhere And then, as you look closer, you see behind the first angels others, fainter, further in, but fair. And, if you still continue looking you will see behind them others again, and still others, until at last the idea of the picture seizes you, and you feel that you are looking into angel-filled deeps of eternity, from the glory on the outer face into glory on and on and on without measure or end.

This earthly life has its angels—its fair, sweet, precious things, health, home, life, wife, husband, child, friend, books, colour, form, pleasure, leisure, work. But we have these treasures in a frail vessel on a land-locked sea, exposed to sudden and violent storms. If these be lost, all is lost? Nay! There are angels behind angels, good beyond all goods of time. Good has no end. 'Tis only evil is limited. Sin, and death, and hell are but little clouds against the planet-peopled azure of eternity. *They* shall perish, but God shall endure, and God is love. Oh, we of little faith, why are we fearful?

III.

Christianity, it is admitted, has taught men purer morals. Men meet daily duties better because Christian people have shown them an example. Ought we not now to show all men a better way of meeting the inevitable sorrows of life? Should not Christian people be an example of *self-possession* to every crew that sails this little storm-vexed lake of life?

"What do you more than others if you salute your brethren only? Do not the publicans and Gentiles the same?" What do you more than others if when a storm arises and the sea is churned into fury around you, you shriek, and cry, and wring your hands in despair. Do not those who know not God, who have never seen one of Christ's signs, the same? The Christ deserved better at the hands of His own. He deserved that His sleep should be watched by their waking trust. And has not God, by years of goodness, by many a revelation of His love, deserved our perfect confidence? Do we not owe it to Him and to the world?

Mr W. E. Henley, who died the other day after a life of much suffering and keen disappointment, sang in strident tones to an iron harp,

> "Beneath the bludgeonings of chance
> My head is bloody, but unbowed."

Better that stern, Stoic temper than the whine and moan of despair, the panic of unfaith. But it is not beautiful. It is not winsome. It is not what God deserves at our hands. It ignores so much in our experience.

Compare with this loud, bitter note of defiance, which, after all, is only a great sob disguised, Stevenson's cheery, hopeful, trustful note. He, too, was ill all his life, poor for the most part, overworked to the end. Yet how brave and genial he was! Propped up in bed, too ill to move—so dangerously ill that he was not allowed to speak lest a word should precipitate hæmorrhage—he continued to work at his books as though there were nothing the matter. When a friend came in, he wrote on the slate which served him as a medium of conversation, "Allow me to introduce you to *Mr Dumbly*"; and all through the illness he jested gaily about Mr Dumbly. Did he mind? My friend! would *you* mind? He was what you are. He had all your feelings. But he had a tremendous confidence in what he called the *ultimate decency* of things. His last prayer was for strength to play the man under affliction. And so, when storms came, and he saw that Christ was sleeping, he was still. He could wait His waking. But till then he was quiet and cheerful. His assurance of God's goodness allowed little jets of fun, very pathetic to those who read them, but pleasant hearing, I think, to Jesus, who hears so much outcry and clamour of men, who pray only because they do not believe, who only call on Him because they are afraid.

IV.

But He allowed Himself to be wakened? Yes. And He granted their frenzied prayer? Yes. The

Lord is full of pity and merciful. He will not always chide. To men who missed their chance He gave another. He heaped wonder upon wonder, until they learned the lesson of absolute trust. The great chapter which should have come in at this place came later. All we miss in the Gospels (and on the disciples' side we miss a great deal), we find in the Acts and the Epistles. After Pentecost Jesus again went into a boat, and His disciples, great and small, followed Him. Tempests rose, the boat was often covered with waves, and He slept. But there was no panic. The sea rose higher. The boat filled. Still He slept; and still *they* trusted. Great seas of persecution broke over them, sweeping many away, but no cry of panic, no shriek of despair, greeted the world's ear. Rather a peace that passed all men's understanding possessed them in life and in death. A faith yet nobler than the Centurion's spoke; in their silence earth as well as heaven marvelled and said, "Great is your faith."

Well, let us lay in great stores of faith that we may not shame Him when the time comes to go to sea with Jesus Christ. The secret of faith is a closer walk with God. To those who know His love, the idea of perishing is absurd and wicked. It is an insult to His gentleness, an injury to His goodness.

Let us walk by faith. Goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life. God is. The winds and the waves obey Him. How much more His children?

DEMONIACS IN THE COUNTRY OF THE GADARENES

By Rev. J. MORGAN GIBBON

DEMONIACS IN THE COUNTRY OF THE GADARENES

The Prayer of the Gadarenes

"And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts."
—Mark v. 17.

This is the miracle at which men smile. The Higher Criticism of the street draws the line at this. Yet Matthew, Mark, and Luke record it. Surely there is truth hidden somewhere in this story. Yes, and a bitter, terrible truth. The Gospels border on irony in this narrative. The scourge of knotted cords is here. A fearful phase of human nature and a pathetic aspect of Christ's work are shown in these verses. To him who reads between the lines there is here scant food for laughter, but much cause for tears.

Exactly what the incident in itself was, is probably irrecoverable for evermore. But the parable of the miracle is a mirror of truth. Who can stand its challenge?

I.

The incident has for its setting a marvellous display of power.

"The man," as Bushnell says, "in Christ seems to sleep, and only the God to be awake." A panorama of omnipotence is unfolded. We see the lake lashed to fury by the sudden storm, the boat driving upon the gale, the disciples panic-stricken, Jesus asleep. The waves grow bold and board the ship. What care those roarers for the name of Christ? Here is brute force, indiscriminating, sullen, eyeless, sweeping human lives like rubbish before it.

> "Streams will not curb their pride
> The just man not to entomb,
> Nor lightnings go aside
> To give his virtues room.
> Nor is that wind less rough which blows a good man's barge."

But He awoke and said, "Peace, be still! and the wind ceased and there was a great calm." Who, then, is This? *This* is the Perfect One who is within and without and above all things, "ruling the clouds of the air and the fishes of the sea, as well as the fear and thoughts of man"; "without quality, good; without quantity, great; without need, creating; without place, governing; without form, containing all things."

Stepping ashore, their souls thrilling with an all but intolerable sense of omnipotence, they encounter

a tempest of another kind. They behold a man driving before a gale of madness and fury. They see that saddest of all sights, a human wreck. But again the word of Christ works a wonder. He rebuked whatever power held this poor wretch in thrall, "and the wind ceased and there was a great calm." Some day, it may be when men have become more teachable, when under stress of necessity they have put off their shoes and are content to sit at Jesus' feet, He will reveal to them the secret of His power over the insane. For, indeed, we need it sadly. Our huge, costly asylums can scarcely lodge, much less cure, the saddest of all our sick. "Canst thou not minister to a *mind* diseased?" Alas, no! It's oh for Him who healed with the laying on of hands!

But meanwhile His fame spreads far and wide. The wireless telegraphy of rumour flashes the tidings of His deed through all the country of the Gadarenes. People come flocking to Him from far and near. Now surely we shall read of another display of power, and a greater. For Christ's great work, His proper work, so to speak, is spiritual. And if these miracles mean anything that success of that work is assured. He has said something of tares being sown in the field, He has spoken also of "wayside" hearers, of shallow, and of thorny ground, in which even His word came to nought. But these parables of misgiving and fear are obliterated by the later revelations of the miracle. Who can stand before His word? Who can resist the Queller of the storm, and the Vanquisher of the dark legions?

The people will fall like swathes of grass before Him, and prayers for life shall rise to His ears. Yes!

the Gadarenes do indeed pray to Him, they beseech Him to depart from their border. That is the prayer of the Gadarenes, a prayer which is a command, an act of banishment, a sentence of exile. They say unto Him, "Go! *and He goeth.*"

This is not a case for power. This is Christ's great problem. To still the wind is easy. To heal the sick is not hard. But power, however great, cannot even enter the moral realm. Force does not exist for the soul. The time may come when "e'en the witless Gadarene shall own that life is sweeter when 'tis clean!" But this greater miracle can be wrought only by that which is greater than power, the spirit and love of God.

II.

But the swine! What shall we say of this feature, so grotesque in itself, and so offensive in the eyes of cultured people?

Why *will* the Evangelists drag this in? With all the editing which we are told went on in former as in modern times, why did no one cut out this absurd incident?

Well, what part the swine played in the actual history is uncertain, but they are essential to the parable. They explain the prayer. Christ's offence was that He valued man above all things. If, for the purpose of this man's complete recovery it was necessary to humour him by some visible sign, Jesus would not hesitate. Man came before all things. Every man, any man.

But to the Gadarenes, not men but swine were precious. They broke with Jesus on no great question, but simply on that. His passion for men came into conflict with their greed, and they banished Him. They had no use for Him. The Gadarene scheme of life left no room for any such enthusiasm of humanity.

It was the first clear utterance of opposition. The disciples were fated to hear it in the future with the growing insistence and passion. The prayer of the Gadarene was the prelude of Calvary. On no grand issue, on no sublime or august question, did the leaders of the nation finally break with Jesus. Their hatred of Him rose out of their love of money and place. He cared only for men. They cared nothing for men. They were Gadarenes. Their interest lay in things He ignored. They asked but one thing, that He should depart. "Away with Him! Crucify Him!" He stilled the storm, He quelled the rage of madness, but man's sin withstood Him. The Gadarenes of Jerusalem *slew* Him.

III.

Has the rising of this terrible parable any sting for our time? Mr Stephen Phillips, in one of his poems, describes Christ in Hades, as about to unbind one imprisoned soul—

> "But He with arm outstretched,
> Suddenly stood. A scene unrolling stayed
> Him who had easily released the dead,"

for He sees the earth again, sees human history defile before His eyes, "an endless host parading past." He

saw the terrible havoc sin would work in the world and in His own Church, and

> "He knew that for a time the great advance
> He must delay, postponing the desire"

of the soul in Hades, because of the greater and more urgent task on earth. Is not the doctrine true? Here, in this world, in *us*, lies God's great difficulty. The true Cross of Jesus is not a piece of dead wood. It is a living Cross. We *are* the Cross. Every day He takes us upon Himself. We burden Him, we shame Him, we pain Him. In us He bleeds and dies daily. We often raise the prayer of the Gadarenes. We often bid Him depart. Oh! stupendous task ever renewed! Oh! patience that never fails! Oh! love that, ever bleeding, ever prays for men. And to our cries of "Depart" makes answer, "I will not leave you desolate, I will come unto you *again!*"

IV.

But the swine, these grotesque details over which Professor Huxley made merry with his readers?

Well, what keeps men back from Christ? What is the ground of the world's quarrel with Him? Is not His offence to-day, as of old, this that He puts man's welfare above all other considerations? Do men ordinarily break with Christ on some high grounds? on dignified and noble questions? Rather is it not on something which they dare not speak out plainly? "The secret of the heart," says George Meredith, "is the heart's pressing love of itself." Yes! there

is no other, and that is one which for shame no man can tell. These poor Gadarenes gave no reason for their prayer. But we know what motived their request; we know, because the heart's secret is its pressing love of itself.

Life is full of these grotesque, satirical things, at which demons laugh, perhaps, but angels weep. What a tragi-comedy is ecclesiastical history! What a mystery theologians have made of a religion that is so simple! What a grotesque thing clergy and laity have made of the Christian Church! "By this," said Jesus, "shall all men know that ye are My disciples, that ye love one another." But some sects and many Christians are not even on speaking terms! yet all invoke Christ's name. Surely the scene in Gadara was tame compared to this. In the sane future ages that are coming, men clothed and in their right mind will, perchance, make no great difficulty of the old Gadarene story; but surely they will refuse to believe in the story of our own times. This will be incredible to them. They will deem it a libel or a jest. But it is true. It is no jest. It is the tragedy of our time, as it is of all times. And our hope is in

V.

The Christ that if He departs at men's bidding, goes away to come again.

Though He go He *will* not leave us. He left His Name in Gadara, and a man to keep it fresh in men's mind. A name "*pour être oublié*," says the French

cynic. No! this name cannot be forgotten. Those very men that prayed Him to go, did they not, later on, when, at the "end of the passage," the weather grew wild, remember Him and pray Him to come to their help in the last storm?

That last word of His, "I am with you all the days," reaches far. He is ever with us. No act of ours can send Him from us. He is our life; and when, after we have in many a foolish, cruel, wicked prayer besought Him to depart, we come to ourselves and amend our prayer, beseeching His pardon and aid, His answer is, "Behold, I am with you all the days."

THE RAISING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER

By Rev. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.

THE RAISING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER

MARK v. 22, 23.

THE fact that the raising of Jairus' daughter is recorded by three of the Evangelists, is an indication that, in their judgment, the incident was important and significant. Three occasions on which Jesus Christ raised the dead are mentioned in the Gospels. Taking them in their historic order, we may discern progress in these manifestations of the Lord's power. On this, the first occasion, the child had but recently died, and was still lying on the bed, surrounded by those who could still see the dear face which seemed now so void and irresponsive. On the next occasion, the young man restored to life had been dead long enough for the funeral to begin, and he was being carried forth on a bier through the village in which he had lived. On the third occasion, we read that when Jesus came to Bethany, Lazarus had been dead three days already, and the grave had closed over him. In all these miracles, then, our Lord gave evidence of His life-giving power with growing intensity, until, finally, the day came when He Himself rose victorious from the grave, in spite of the Sanhedrin's seal, and the Roman guard.

In this narrative there is much which clearly illustrates the character and work of the Lord Jesus. His disinterested kindness is exhibited throughout. No doubt His miracles were attestations of divine power, but they were never wrought with a mere idea of winning fame or applause. On the contrary, Jesus endeavoured to silence the demands of a gaping curiosity when men desired to see from Him some sign from heaven. He refused the worldly homage offered when the people would have taken Him by force to make Him a King. Throughout His life He was constantly repeating His rejection of Satan's temptation, "All this will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." He even put a check on the natural spread of His fame, lest people should care too much for the blessings He gave, and should offer Him adulation as a mere wonder-worker. When, therefore, He healed the sick, or raised the dead, His act was one of pure benevolence. Had He willed it, all the riches of the world might have been poured at His feet, but He had not where to lay His head. Had He wished it, Jairus and others would have freely given Him all they possessed, but He displayed His restoring power without money and without price. He was the true image of the Father in heaven, who delights in mercy, who sends His rain and sunshine without effort or solicitation or thanks on our part. He makes fruitful the garden of the cottager, as well as the grounds of the wealthy. He lets ferns grow in shady hollows, and flowers adorn heaps of refuse. With prodigal hand He blesses all His creatures, and constrains us to say, "The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works."

The personal interest which our Lord took in every one whom He blessed is worthy of note. We all know that if we are acquainted with many subjects, our knowledge is less accurate than if we know but few; that if we are associated with many people we cannot know all of them well. Our minds are finite, and if we concentrate our thought upon any business or person, to that extent it is to the exclusion of others. This is not so with Him who has all power and all knowledge. Though He rules angels and worlds, He hears a stifled sigh and feels a feeble touch. The most obscure and despised are not left by Him to battle alone with their griefs and difficulties, but they may boldly look up to heaven and say, "He loves *me*, and cares for *me*." He would not hurry over the case of the poor woman in the crowd, pressing though the call was to hasten His footsteps; nor would He allow the delay which thus occurred to prevent the coming of a full blessing to the ruler who trusted Him.

I.

Let us first learn some lessons from the Suppliant Ruler.

This man stands before us as one who exhibits, though in a different degree from the woman, that faith without which it is impossible to please God.

It is to be observed that faith is the one thing which Christ inexorably demanded, on all occasions, from those who would receive a blessing at His hands.

"Believest thou that I am able to do this?" He asked the blind man. To the father of the lunatic boy He said, "All things are possible to him that believeth." Here He said to the trembling woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee," though He recognised her ignorance. To Jairus himself, when the worst news came, He exclaimed, "Be not afraid, only believe."

It is still faith which is the one means of pardon, salvation, and peace. There are two, for example, who have sinned, one of whom walks in liberty, while the other is burdened, as Christian was when he set out from the City of Destruction. What is the cause of the difference? Simply this—that one fails to take God at His word. Although he may have grieved over sin and may inwardly hate it, he fails to accept the assurance, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." Similar experiences occur amid the sorrows of life. The serenity of a Christian whom you visit in trouble simply amazes you. It is not because his trouble is easier to bear, or because it is less keenly felt, but because there is trust in God that somehow He will educe good from it. In the instance before us it was belief in Christ's willingness and ability which prepared for a blessing, and in proportion to faith was inward peace.

1. *The faith of Jairus must have been unexpected by the disciples.*

He was a ruler of the synagogue, *i.e.*, the president of one of the Jewish congregations in Capernaum. It was his duty to superintend and direct the public services, and to preside over the college of elders. He was, in fact, a sort of pastor and professor, so that

his prejudice would naturally be strong against Jesus who was generally regarded as a teacher of heresy. We all know how people, bound together by virtue of belonging to the same class or holding the same office, are apt to think and act together. It requires considerable boldness on the part of a physician, for example, to go out of the track of ordinary and orthodox treatment; and much the same may be said of those who are religious teachers. Now all of those associated with Jairus probably were antagonistic to our Lord's teaching and claims, and some of them attributed His miracles to an evil source, and all of them sought to disparage His authority. Yet this one man among them had faith enough in Jesus of Nazareth to win a blessing for himself and for his home. How often it is true that some whom we regard as the least likely are the most fully blessed! The appeal which is unheeded by those brought up in Christian homes, may sometimes effectively touch some poor waif who has drifted in from a sea of iniquity and may bring peace to his troubled heart. As Jesus put it, "Many will come from the east and from the west to sit down in the kingdom of God," whilst those who, in opportunity, have been far more favoured, will be shut out.

2. *The faith of this ruler germinated in his grief.*

He had been shut up with his little daughter when she lay ill, and was probably for a time cut off from his ordinary duties and associations. We can imagine him sitting there, holding her little hand in his, while she, having heard something of Jesus, as every child in Capernaum must have done,

spoke of His love and of His power. The man's heart would be specially tender, and would be singularly responsive to the slightest appeal from her, and little by little the resolve would be formed in him to make at least an effort to secure a blessing from this wonderful teacher, such as the child told him had been given to others. In the hope that the coming disaster of death might even yet be averted by the love and power of the Prophet of Galilee, he came forth before people who knew him well, and bowed himself down at Jesus' feet. There have been many since who, in spite of old associations, have learned this lesson in their sorrow, and, have stretched out their hands to the Christ of God, as did Peter sinking in the sea, crying, "Lord, save, or I perish." Illness or anxiety for the life of some dear one has brought many in an agony of prayer to His feet, as he was brought who said, "Lord, have mercy on my child, for she is at the point of death." Faith often springs up from the soil of trouble.

3. *This faith of Jairus was severely tried.*

Hope must have sprung up in his heart when Jesus, listening to his prayer, instantly rose to follow him; but the crowd would not suffer Him to hasten, and the woman interrupted His progress still further, and seemed to forestall the ruler. Christ was so delayed that when He finally drew near the house some one rushed out with the tragic news for Jairus, "Thy daughter is dead, trouble not the Master any further." Jairus had yet to learn that no one who is in real earnest is a trouble to Jesus, that the Lord was thinking of him and preparing him for a higher

blessing all the time, knowing that the trial of his faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might ultimately be found to the glory of God.

Similarly, many have prayed, but the answer has been delayed. Though a cry for light has arisen, the way seems dark as ever; though deliverance from disaster has been craved, no answer has been vouchsafed. But often during the delay the work of God in the heart has been deepened, and we all have to learn to let patience have her perfect work, that we may become perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

4. *The faith of Jairus was lovingly encouraged.*

A great storm had tested the roots of this tree, and when it seemed about to fall Jesus said to the tempest, "Peace, be still." When the people said to the ruler, "Thy daughter is dead," at once Jesus said, "Be not afraid, only believe." Even then, however, we can well believe that the father's heart sank as he entered his home, and saw the hired mourners already lamenting the child's death, and it would be hard for him to believe the assurance, "She is not dead but sleepeth," but he evidently did believe it, and this kept hope alive in his heart until the blessing came.

II.

Now let us look at the dead maiden.

In answer to the father's prayer, and perhaps in answer to her own prayer before she died, Jesus came

to raise the dead child. The house was full of hired mourners. He heard the music of the flutes, and the droning of the liturgical chants, and the wailing and crying with which the professional mourners tried still further to excite the grief already prevailing, and there was something stern about His command, "Give place." To Him who was perfectly natural and sincere and true, professional mourning must have been specially offensive. Although it is natural and Christian to sorrow for our dead, to howl and to cry as these did is little short of heathenish. Indeed, in our times of deepest sorrow we would far rather have the few whose hearts are really touched with sympathy, than the many who crowd around the grave, with purchased or ceremonial grief. All such Jesus Christ put out, and we too must rid ourselves of all that is artificial and false in dealing with Him. It is necessary for some of us to be set free from the company of the mockers who laugh Him to scorn if we would hear His voice, and some of us know what it is to say,

> "In secret silence of the mind,
> My God, and there my heaven, I find."

It is often in the quiet hour, when we are alone, that Christ speaks to us with the greatest power, and He will do so if only we are ready to say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

1. *This little girl lying cold and still was an example of physical death.*

When Jesus said, "She is not dead," He did not mean that she was in a trance. He spoke metaphorically, as He did when He said of Lazarus, "Our

friend Lazarus sleepeth," and just afterwards added, "Lazarus is dead." Such a declaration as this is the very opposite of what any boasting impostor would have said, for he would seek to deepen the impression of death in order to magnify his own power in the opinion of those around. The desire of Christ, however, was not to magnify Himself, but lovingly to prepare these people for the coming joy, and therefore He spoke of death as a sleep. And sleep is a beautiful image of death. Death follows on weariness when work has been hard and sorrows many. It gives quietude, of which the silent body is an emblem. It will be followed by a glorious awakening, when the redeemed will stand forth in the image of Christ. And He who gave this child back to her parents, and the lad at Nain to his mother, and Lazarus to his sisters, we may be sure will restore those who have gone before to the dear ones who follow after.

2. *Finally, look at the dead maiden as an emblem of spiritual death.*

She lay there quite unconscious, whilst her friends were praying, and it was then that, in the language which a nurse or mother would use, Jesus said, "Talithi cumi." She heard the loving voice, and felt the touch of His hand, and woke to see Jesus face to face, and her whole heart, we may be sure, was His. As truly He speaks to us, stirring feelings within us, reviving old memories, and rousing a love towards Himself which is the germ of the life eternal.

The child's life was restored, and with loving care for her, even in little things, He told them to give her something to eat, for He evidently wished them

to understand that she was still to live in the old home, to frequent the old haunts, though henceforth dominated by a new love in her heart. We, also, who are alive to righteousness, are called upon to go back to the old work in a new spirit, to make home glad in the name and for the sake of Jesus, and to witness for Him in former associations. Some may be called to public confession, such as the Lord expected from the woman He cured; but others may be called, as evidently the child was, to obscure and quiet witness-bearing. For her sake the matter was not to be blazed abroad lest the beauty of her childlike trust and the simplicity of her character should be marred and spoiled. But whether we are in the light of publicity, or in the quietness of home, we well may offer the prayer:—

"I pray Thee, Saviour, keep
Me in Thy love,
Until death's hallowed sleep
Shall me remove
To that fair realm
Where, sin and sorrow o'er,
Thou and Thine own
Are one for evermore."

TOUCHING THE BORDER OF CHRIST'S ROBE

The Woman with an Issue of Blood

By Rev. W. J. TOWNSEND, D.D.

TOUCHING THE BORDER OF CHRIST'S ROBE

The Woman with an Issue of Blood

"And touched the border of his garment."—Luke viii. 44.

The case of this woman was extremely pathetic. For twelve years she had groaned under her complaint, banned by the law, banished from intercourse from her friends, trying many physicians, being worse rather than better for their treatment, and after having long been reduced to hopelessness, she is now awakened to a new possibility. He had come concerning whom the national bard had said: "He healeth all thy diseases," and with a feeling of expectation in her mind, to which she had long been a stranger, she came to the new Healer who had risen among men. His fame had gone far and wide, He had cured people of every ailment, with the ease and readiness which proved Him to have unfailing resources. He was even then proceeding on a mission in behalf of the daughter of a rich functionary in the Jewish Church when He was arrested by a unique experience. "Virtue had gone out of Him." No words had passed, no appeal had

been made; but this afflicted woman, shrinking from sight, timid by disappointment, had softly stolen behind the great Physician whose fame had penetrated to her chamber of sorrow, and seeing the border of blue on His garment, stamping Him as a public teacher, she said: "If I do but touch His garment I shall be whole," and straightway she "came behind Him and touched the border of His garment, and immediately the issue of her blood was stanched." Thus Jesus was charged with healing power, He could scatter miracles like seed broadcast on the wayside, a touch of need caused His brimming love at any moment to overflow. No act of mercy wrought by Him is more suggestive of helpful lessons than is this, although but a few can be noted here.

I.

Faith in Christ is the last resource of a needy soul.

A sufferer only can realise what those twelve long years must have been to this woman, during which she had sought advice of every class of physician, each with his special prescription, with the invariable result that tampering with unskilful advisers exhausted her means, and left her worse than before. She had listened not only to doctors of repute, but to quacks and neighbours, trying numberless nostrums, recommended as of unfailing virtue. But the result was utter disappointment

in each case, and "she was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse." She had spent all; poverty and pain, shame and exclusion, were the lot of her life, and hope had departed from her soul. But hope in earthly means had only failed in order that she might be drawn to effectual faith in the Divine Healer.

In this, the woman symbolises the sinner. There is no need to prove either the fact of human sin, nor the utter failure of human effort to cure the disease or eradicate its virus. Human laws may reform man's external habits and manners, they may effect an outward observance of conventional respectability, but no code of laws, no ceremonial ritual, no gifts of wealth, no sacrifices on the altar, and no self-inflicted macerations, can cleanse away sin, nor give spiritual life and health. It is remarkable that no great human leader or teacher has ever made profession or promise to accomplish such a miracle. Buddha nor Zoroaster, Confucius nor Laotse, Menu nor Mahomet, has never dared to make such a pretension. Jesus Christ is the only one who has ever offered to say to the sinner: "Thy sins be forgiven thee," and untold millions have testified that the word has been accompanied with healing and restoring power.

As this woman did, so man the sinner has done. He has spent his living on many physicians, and is none the better but rather the worse. The world has counselled him to try many methods by which the perilous stuff may be purged that weighs upon the heart, and his pride and unbelief have alike prompted him to listen to worldly charmers, to try their recipes,

and trust their counsel before coming to Jesus. He has tried the pleasures of life, the maxims of philosophy, the laws of morality, the absorbing excitements of the market and the exchange, but all in vain; and at last he has had to cry, like Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" To that question one answer only can be given, and it comes from the Christ, who says, 'I that speak in righteousness mighty to save."

II.

Faith is endowed with an unerring instinct in finding the Christ.

Perhaps it would be more correct to say that it *is* an instinct of a high spiritual order. But it is wonderful to observe how quick it is to discern and acknowledge the Christ. We cannot fully tell how this woman was drawn to Him, what led her to leave her seclusion, and to brave the censures of the rulers and lawyers by mingling with the crowd which had gathered round Jesus. The depth of her need and the sadness of her disappointment drew her forth when the rumours that Rabbi Jesus, the Healer, had come into the neighbourhood, reached her. Like many other sufferers who are much shut out from the hum of busy life, she was quick to gather up passing news, and there were many who were glad to convey them. Therefore she ventured—faith is alway ventur-

ous—and when she saw Him, her faith strengthened itself. His Personality attracted and impressed her; the tidings she had gathered of His restoring power and grace combined with His presence, His learning, His magnetic charm, all led her to cast herself on His bounty, and she said, "If I do but touch His garment I shall be whole." This is an instance of the intuitive or instinctive power of faith. It flies directly to the mark, as an eagle soars to the sun. It does not consciously reason, although it always has reason for its base. The faith faculty comes into active exercise when reason has done its mission, and there is no more that it can do. When urged by a craving which will not be gainsaid, and by a need that must be satisfied, faith leaves all other mental processes to grope in their darkness, and springs to its goal of light and grace.

This is the experience of the sinner burdened with his iniquities and groaning for relief. When the Christ comes into view, he is arrested, he looks with entranced gaze, the conviction of His ability to save takes hold upon him, and with simple, childlike directness he grasps the blessing and cries, "My Lord and my God." It is the needle vibrating to the pole; it is the plant creeping to the light; it is the sensitised nature, made ready by need and suffering, which responds to a secret call of the Divine Spirit. "My sheep hear My voice," said Jesus, "and I know them, and they follow Me." The words of the woman whispered in her heart, "If I do but touch," was but the eager response to the secret voice which invites us still, the sweetness of His yoke to prove. The sinner's appeal for help is but the outcome of an

inward divine prompting. Happy soul that promptly obeys and finds at once the secret of the Lord!

III.

Faith always establishes contact between Christ and the needy seeker.

Cure by Christ is cure by contact. "Touching" taps the secret stores of the universe. "Christ in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (Colossians ii. 3). "It was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell" (Colossians i. 19). The sweet influences of the Pleiades, the richness of the grain, the virtue of the herb, the aroma of the flower, the efficiency of air and sea, the harmony of the spheres, and the glory of the firmament, all come from Him, and in the spiritual universe He lives, breathes, operates in all, and is the light and glory of heaven itself. It is contact with Him by faith that unlocks the hidden store, that causes the grace to flow and the love to bless. No touch, then no cure. No contact, then no experience of restoration or salvation. It was the touch of the woman which brought the cure, because the touch showed the simplicity and the implicitness of her faith in the great Physician.

There is a wide difference between the touch of faith and the touch of curiosity, or of criticism, or of unbelief. The woman's touch, into which was crowded the intense desire and confidence of an earnest soul,

was infinitely removed from the thronging pressure of the people who crowded round the Christ with no higher feeling within them than they would have shown if a charlatan had claimed their attention. The touch was discriminated by Jesus, the healing virtue flowed towards the afflicted one, "Jesus turned Him about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched My garments?' Peter said, and they that were with Him, 'Master, the multitudes press Thee and crush Thee.' But Jesus said, 'Some one did touch Me; for I perceived that power had gone forth from Me.'" Such is the mighty difference in the treatment of Jesus by an anxious soul and by a curious, gaping crowd. One touches, and the others only throng. One comes into living contact, and the others press near to satisfy their sense of wonder, and pass on, entire strangers to His infinite power and love.

The woman was the only one who "touched" in all the crowd, and she was the only one who gained a blessing. Christ knows a "touch." "Somebody did touch Me," He said. He knew and knows now how to distinguish the true touch of faith. It puts the believing soul into connection with the grace, the power, the healing virtue, of which He is the treasury, and then the desired boon is quickly given. The disciples, as usual at this stage of their education, were shallow and vulgar in their appreciation of the situation. They were neither receptive nor responsive. They were held back by their limitations and prejudices from many a glimpse into the inwardness of their Master, and therefore the expostulatory, the half-rebuking tone in which they addressed Him. But in the meantime the woman had reached forth

her hand, she touched the border of His floating blue robe, at once she felt the change, the glow of health rushed into her frame, and she was whole of her plague.

IV.

Christ readily responds to simple faith.

There was a rudimentariness in the faith of this woman, which was pathetic. She sought a cure, she simply and implicitly believed that Christ could cure, and she said, "If I do but touch His garment I shall be made whole." There was no relation between the robe and the cure. There was no healing virtue in the garment of Christ, but the timid, shrinking sufferer thought that the virtue could percolate through anything belonging to Christ. Therefore Christ met her simplicity and childishness by looking to her faith and not to her ignorance. "She did what she could," and He accepted her offering of trust. He "knew her frame and remembered that she was dust." Therefore, as she came trembling in response to His call for her, "falling down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people for what cause she touched Him, and how she was immediately healed," He said to her, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace, and be made whole of thy plague." So Christ ever meets the sinner. He may be ignorant, limited in his idea, erroneous in his method, but sincerity, a sense of need, and a childlike faith will draw from Christ the blessing of grace and

love. There will be no reluctance, no delay, no hesitancy, but a royal, free, ready, unstinted bestowal of the needed blessing, a blessing only limited by our capacity to receive, and a blessing growing in fulness according as our faith's capacity is stretched wider and wider still.

V.

A great truth is taught us in this narrative as to the presence of Christ with us to-day, and the virtue that may still flow to us through His robe or garment.

His constant presence with us is pledged by His words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." In His Christly nature as the God-man, He is in heaven, carrying on His great intercessory ministry on our behalf; but in His Divine nature, and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, He is ever with us, and all may touch Him by faith, and share His power and saving compassion. Not more real was His mercy to this woman than is His love to-day towards the chief of sinners. Not more fully charged with virtue was His garment of old, than are the garments to-day by which He is manifested to the people and the nations. So Whittier sweetly sings:

> "The healing of His seamless dress,
> Is by our beds of pain:
> We touch Him in life's throng and press,
> And we are whole again."

May not the Bible we cherish be reckoned as a robe of Christ of exceeding preciousness? Is it not full of His name and presence from the first pregnant promise given in Eden to our first parents down the stream of time to the last chapter which tells of His final enthronement in glory? And when touched by the humble, meek, and reverent student, is it not found to be charged with truth and wisdom, which flow freely into the disciple's soul, filling him with joy unspeakable? This robe is like the garments of the King as described in the rapturous psalm of the old Hebrew hymnal: "All thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia." It is decorated and ornamented by the hands of the most gifted poets, statesmen, philosophers, and historians the world has ever known; it is instinct with divine life and influence; it is fragrant with sweetest perfume. Ever the spring of a glorious national life, ever the moulder of high and noble character, ever the inspirer of human liberty and progress, and all these because Christ is in it, first and last, all pervading and all prominent, the source of purity and happiness to all who in sincere and humble frame consider its precepts.

As in regard to the Person of Jesus, so also as to this glorious Christly robe. There are many who crowd upon it and gain no blessing from it. They criticise it, they deny it, they treat it perfunctorily, they hurl against it epithets of contempt. For these we have no harsh words, but we pity and mourn over them. But the earnest soul touches by faith, and inspiration flows forth, until poets sing like Milton, and imagine like Bunyan, and think like Ruskin, and live like Baxter, and die like the glorious army of martyrs.

The Church of the Lord Jesus is a glorious robe; the Holy Catholic Church, with its simple and majestic creeds, its solemn sacraments and services, and its thronging followers the world over. It is the Body of which Christ is the Head, and the Body is clothed to us in divine grace and majesty. The Body of Christ is not dead, in the tomb, subject to corruption, but is alive, and in the Church, instinct with life and power in every fibre. He is the indwelling presence which enables the Church to give out the rich comfort, the inspiring fellowship, the educating influences, the surging enthusiasm which are experienced by the members of the Church. He is the attractive and vitalising power by which the Church becomes a home to the saintly of the earth, a school wherein are trained labourers, sufferers, missionaries, and teachers for the evangelisation of all men, one great gathering place ever spreading and multiplying until the world, purified and sanctified, shall be embraced in its everlasting arms.

But as to the Church also, the souls needing shelter and succour must touch; and not the Church only, but the Christ who is the indwelling power giving to all efficiency and glory. There is a disposition abroad at this time to so exalt the Church as to hide the Christ, so to display the garments as to conceal the living presence of the Head. The Church is only useful as it becomes a vehicle for Christly life and power to be communicated to believing souls, as garments are only profitable when used to contribute to the health and efficiency of the person who wears them. It is perilous to join the Church and be destitute of Christ, and it is as perilous to profess to be

in contact with Christ and yet contemn or neglect His Church. But the Bible, Schemes of Theology, the Church with its ordinances and ministries, while fitly to be reckoned as robes or garments of the Christ, are not Him. He is in them, through them, and gives to them their vitality and their glory, and He alone can give healing or grace to the seeking soul. It is only when the soul "touches," when it comes penitent, suppliant, believing, and casts itself buoyantly upon His infinite love that He receives and cures; and it is only when He is sought in the Bible, or the Church, that they are found to be channels or means of grace to the earnest mind.

BLESSINGS PROPORTIONED TO FAITH

The Opening of the Eyes of Two Blind Men

By Rev. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.

BLESSINGS PROPORTIONED TO FAITH

The Opening of the Eyes of Two Blind Men

"According to your faith be it unto you."—MATTHEW ix. 29.

THIS suggestive and inspiring utterance of our Lord's accompanied the cure of two blind men. It was intended to give us inward illumination, of which their restored eyesight was a symbol. They appear to have surpassed most of the people around them in their believing expectation, and therefore in their readiness to receive the special blessing they sought. Perhaps their very privation had helped them. Shut off from ordinary scenes which often distract men from their spiritual needs and possibilities, they had evidently been thinking over what Jesus had done elsewhere, and of what He might graciously do for them. True, no blind men had been previously cured (so far as we know), though the affliction was very common, owing to the custom of sleeping in the open, to the prevalence of sandstorms, and to the glaring reflection of light in a country where verdure was rare. But though this was probably the first occasion of such a

cure, the faith of these blind men was strong enough to overleap the barrier of precedent and to argue that the power and goodness which had healed divers diseases might also restore their sight. And the greatness of their blessing was proportioned to the greatness of their faith.

Notice, however, that even their faith was tested. The prayer they offered in the roadway was apparently unheeded, but when Jesus entered the house these suppliants followed Him up, as He knew they would do. This gave greater quietude and deliberation to the miracle. It afforded opportunity for the earnestness of these men to be more fully revealed, and for a confession of faith to be made by them. And this would help the onlookers to understand the principle on which all divine blessings come. When the blind men came to Him, "Jesus said unto them, 'Believe ye that I am able to do this?' They say unto Him, 'Yea, Lord.' Then touched He their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith be it unto you,' and their eyes were opened."

I do not intend to dwell on that cure, nor on the obvious analogy between blindness physical and blindness spiritual, but simply to elucidate the connection between man's faith and God's gifts, which it may be for our spiritual profit to examine and apply to our own condition and circumstances.

Faith is set forth here as the link between human need and divine fulness. It is the channel along which the higher blessing comes, and but for which it does not reach us. The source is inexhaustible, and can enrich us all beyond measure. News has lately come from Egypt to the effect that scarcity is feared,

because the Nile is unusually low, and the cause of this is that the great Lake Nyanza is two feet below its usual level. No springs in the channel itself can make up for that loss; but, unlike that lake, the inexhaustible fulness of the divine nature and resources may be absolutely reckoned on by any one of us in time of need, and all we have to fear is lest the channel should become choked by our worldliness or by our doubt. It is as a means of contact between the human and the divine, between man and his Maker, that faith is made so much of in Scripture. In itself faith in God is nothing which can be appreciated by our fellow-men, as our philanthropy may be, and hence many are disposed to make little of it. "Do the right thing," they say, "live a good life, and leave out of consideration and out of cultivation this transcendental talk about faith."

Such teaching as this, "Without faith it is impossible to please God," is, to these men, incredible and even incomprehensible. But faith is not, as they assume it to be, a virtue which has an artificial value given to it by theologians. It is the soul's one receptive faculty. It is the hand which takes what the divine hand gives, and apart from which we cannot lay hold of what is spiritual. True, it is invisible and immeasurable. Much else is. The new system of wireless telegraphy seems to many an incredible one, for how, say they, can a message pass from one place to another without some wire to connect the two? But though the medium is intangible and invisible, there *is* a medium, and but for the ether through which vibrations pass, no message could be transmitted. Faith is like the ether. It cannot be

seen or touched, but it is the medium along which divine power comes into human souls, and apart from which it cannot come.

Now Jesus teaches us here not only that blessings come through faith, but also that they are greater or less according to the proportion of faith, and He implies that there is no limit to the blessings we may have if only on our side faith is strong enough. The larger the faith, the larger the blessing.

It is not thus in our relations with our fellow-men, as we know. On the contrary, we have added a cynical verse to the Beatitudes, and we sometimes say, "Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed." And there have been men who have been so wofully disappointed in their once sanguine expectations from others that they are ready to give up hope for the future, and heartily wish that they had never expected anything from a niggard world. Yet possibly even our failure to gain all we hoped for from our fellows may have brought blessings with it. Each request that has met with refusal may have put duty plainly before another who may be the better for it when he comes to think it over. Each disappointment may have taught us the needed lesson of humility or of patience. And that hopeful, sanguine temper of ours, which would not anticipate rebuff or failure till it actually came, may have cheered others around us when we little thought of it. In spite of some such advantages, however, our faith in our fellow-men may have been rudely shaken by such experiences. Still, let us reflect, as we turn to God, that His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. At all times, in all

places, He is more generous and responsive than we deserve or expect. To quote a familiar phrase: "He is able to do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we ask or think." Therefore, let us once more say to our soul, "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, for the help of His countenance." "According to your faith," says the Lord, "be it unto you."

I.

Let us see how true this text is, first in the reception of blessings, and second in our diffusion of the blessings.

It has been well said that "the trust with which we lean upon the bruised reeds of human nature is the same as that with which we lean upon the iron pillar of a Saviour's aid." We may therefore find an example of the truth we are considering in human relationships, as well as in those that are divine.

(1) *Think, for example, of the blessings which come to us through our daily labour.*

They are dependent on our faith, and to a great extent proportioned to it. Farming, which is the most ancient and fundamental form of human industry, well exemplifies this. Much of the labour expended on the land is not directly productive. To break up the fallow ground, to purchase seed and scatter it where it seems to be lost, to pay people for weeding and harrowing, seems so much dead loss. There are months of spending and only weeks of reaping, yet the sane man trusts the laws of nature, in other words, depends on the steadfast government of God, and he

has faith to believe that harvest will follow seed-sowing. "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth."

Precisely the same principle asserts itself, and the same dependence upon it appears in every department of trade and commerce. If it were not for faith, every shop and office might be closed, and the busy hive of human industry would soon be silent. It is faith also which leads parents to have their children taught, and that leads these young people in their turn to acquire what they believe they will need in an unknown future. This application of the principle is too obvious and too familiar to require further elucidation.

2. *Turn next to our homes, for there we expect something beyond the more material ends we seek in business.*

The happiness of a home depends on mutual love and trust. The father expects submission and love from his children, but these would not be his if he did not expect them and look for them. If from the time his first baby was born, he was habitually suspicious of his children, he would not be gladdened with the sunshine of their love. If he said within himself, "I feel sure my children hate me, indeed I suspect they are beginning to do so already," his sullen looks would inevitably blight their budding affections. They would begin to fear him, as Floy learned to dread her father when her timid attempts to win his love were coldly repulsed. The father's suspicion and dislike would breed dislike. According to his lack of faith would be his lack of love.

How different it is with our Heavenly Father. He expects love from every one of us, looks for it, seeks to win it in a thousand ways, and above all by com-

mending His own love to us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

It is a wonderful thought—one that perhaps comes too rarely to us—that in spite of our sins God has faith in us, expects the best of us, and willingly trusts us. Has He not put us in trust with His Gospel, so that we may hinder its spread, and grudge its claims, as some of us do? Has He not put us in trust with this wonderful world of His, that we may make it a heaven or a hell as we determine? Has He not trusted us with our own children, and with the fashioning of the environment of those we employ? Did He not send His only begotten Son into the world, in the spirit of one who says, "They will reverence My Son," though with wicked hands men crucified and slew Him? And will He not ask an account of all this at last, when He will prove Himself ready to reward every man according as his works shall be? God has faith in us. May He help us to respond with faith in Him.

3. *Now let us apply this law of the kingdom to the spiritual blessings within our reach.*

The miracles of Jesus Christ, though they were unusual examples of divine power, were intended to reveal to us the nature of His working. By them we are clearly taught that the Lord Himself could not bless if people would not believe that the blessing would come. The element of receptivity was absolutely necessary: expectancy was insisted on. The question put to these blind men, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" was practically put to every one who sought a blessing, although they were not always asked for it verbally, because He needed not

that any should tell Him, for He knew what was in man. And where there was great need for blessing, but no faith in Himself as a healer, He could do no mighty works because of their unbelief. Thus it still is in respect of all spiritual blessings which come to us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Forgiveness of our sins, for example, comes through faith alone. We have no evidence of our being forgiven in outward change or by inward voice ; we have only the assurance that because our sins are repented of, confessed and forsaken, they are pardoned, and that we are in the blessed state of the man to whom the Lord imputeth no iniquity. Our realisation of this, our joy in it, depends entirely on our belief in that assurance, "According to your faith, so be it unto you."

Similarly with the strength and courage we need. The supply of these will be proportioned to our faith. If we are confident that the God we love will help us through, we shall bear our burdens and face our troubles with an assurance impossible to us otherwise. It was because, from his own sweet experience, George Neumarck understood this, that he taught us the lesson we are very slow to learn :

"Only be still, and wait His leisure
In cheerful hope, with heart content
To take whate'er Thy Father's pleasure
And all-discerning love hath sent ;
Nor doubt our inmost wants are known
To Him who chose us for His own.

"Sing, pray, and keep His ways unswerving,
So do thine own part faithfully,
And trust His word for, undeserving,
Thou yet shalt find it true for thee :
God never yet forsook at need
The soul that trusted Him indeed."

In patience and bravery, in joy and peace, right through life, "According to thy faith be it unto thee."

Do not distrust God. Believe always that He who has begun a good work in you will carry it on without fail to completion. Refuse the suggestion of the Devil that bad habits cannot be overcome, that certain faults of yours are unconquerable. Do not allow the fear of failure to keep you back from avowing love to the Lord. Never shrink back from any service called for as if it were impossible to you. "All things are possible to him that believeth." "According to your faith be it unto you."

II.

Now let us see how this law which applies to the reception of blessings may also apply to the distribution of them. Our success in this will depend on the faith that is in us.

During our Lord's ministry, men and women became channels through which His blessings flowed to others. Two things qualified them for this: the one, affection to the Saviour; the other, faith in the Healer. The Centurion who pleaded successfully for his servant; the Syro-Phœnician woman who begged deliverance for her daughter; the father troubled about his lunatic son; Martha and Mary weeping over their dead brother, are all examples of this. In each of these faith was asked for, and expectancy won the blessing which non-

expectancy would have lost. The disciples on one occasion were very clearly shown the cause of their failure, when to their question, "Why could we not cast him out?" Jesus answered, "Because of your unbelief."

Here lies the secret of our failure to win spiritual results, in spite of the fact that religious activity was never greater than now. We need to put up the prayer, "Lord, increase our faith." Sometimes a father or mother has given up hope about a wayward child, and their fear has fulfilled itself. Perhaps there was not half so much real evil in the lad as they imagined — a flippant manner, a boyish delight in shocking the sober-minded, a temperament totally different from that of either parent, may have led these to misunderstand, to rebuke unwisely, to pull the cord so tight that the young creature kicked over the traces altogether —this has sometimes been the cause of failure to bring up a child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You will never be the means of saving anybody until you are convinced that he can be saved.

It is not always that failure comes because all expectation of blessing dies out in us. Sometimes it arises from the fact that we expect what is less than the highest end — the salvation of the soul. The Sunday School teacher may be an example to all his fellows in punctuality and regularity, in careful preparation and the like, but suppose his only ambition is to have a well-ordered and well-instructed class, suppose that he would be startled and surprised if any scholar came with the urgent

question, "What must I do to be saved?" then he would probably reap what he sowed, and though all in his class might pass examinations in Scripture knowledge, none would be rejoicing in the assurance that they were forgiven and saved. "According to your faith, according to the nature of your expectations, be it unto you." This is still the divine fiat for every Christian worker.

Let us be on our guard, then, against the lowering of the ideal and the lessening of faith. Some who began to preach or teach with trembling lips and faltering hearts did more for God in those old days of their timidity than they do now when fervour has been sacrificed to formality and glibness has displaced devoutness. And one with such lamentable experience affects others too, until the school, the home, the church, may be disastrously lowered in tone, and zeal becomes the peculiarity of the few and not the grace of all.

> "Oh, Saviour Christ, our woes dispel;
> For some are sick and some are sad;
> And some have never loved Thee well,
> And some have lost the love they had."

Is it thus with any of us? To lose faith in our fellows and to lose faith in God is the beginning of religious paralysis and death. If we are thus beginning to suffer let us repent, that once more Christ's own power may rest on us. Hope filled the heart of sinking Peter directly he felt the touch of the Lord's hand. Power clothed all the disciples when their Lord sent down the Holy Spirit to quicken them in their weaknesses and despondency.

This is what is within our reach, if we leave our sins, shake ourselves clear of our worldliness, and pour out our souls in longing at His feet. For still Jesus says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Not the rest of idleness, indeed, but the rest of quiet hearts whose trust in God is so perfect, that they are sure of a blessing for themselves and for their fellows. Then we shall no longer despair about ourselves or others, knowing that God can succeed where we fail, and that, in spite of our weakness and the victories of evil over good, He will answer our prayer:

"Let not my peace be broken when the wrong
Conquers the right, but let me still wait on:
The day of right is coming, late but long,
Long right beneath the sway of the All-Righteous One."

In joy, in peace, in happy, resultful service, "According to thy faith be it unto thee."

HEALING OF THE SICK OF THE PALSY

By Rev. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

HEALING OF THE SICK OF THE PALSY

The Power to do comes with the Attempt to obey.

"Then saith he to the sick of the palsy: Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house."—MATTHEW ix. 6, 7.

THE first thought suggested here is that if we each one have a bit of faith, Christ's power will come upon us, though not another person in the assembly asks for it, or cares to have it. Divine gifts are more easily received when the very atmosphere of the place is receptive, when the atmosphere is sympathetic and electrical, when many hearts and minds together are swayed by the same impulses, and alive with the same expectancy. Souls then rise heavenward together, each one lifted up by the mass of hallowed emotion with which he is in contact. But that help is not indispensable. One in the crowd may get virtue from Christ, though all the rest shut their hearts against it. Here was a saving act done in an atmosphere of unbelief. The company was very mixed. There were religious professors, whose piety was all outside. There were scribes with a

smattering of knowledge in their little heads, and no hearts at all. There were selfish, pushing, vulgar people, who would not make way for a sick and paralysed man. There were scoffers and confirmed sceptics, ready to deny or throw ridicule on everything that Christ did and said. Unbelief and hardness of heart were shown on every face. It was certainly not a place or gathering favourable to the workings of God.

But there was one man who had come prepared—one man with a humbled spirit, because he carried the burden of a wounded and broken life. This one man, full of weariness and pain, came with a prayer for help in his heart, with an urgent sense of need driving him, with a faint hope that Christ might possibly do something for him. He was the one man with a bit of faith; and that bit of faith moved the compassion of the Saviour, touched the springs of His divine power, and brought healing. He got the blessing which was lost upon all the others. Yes, it does not matter where we are—though unbelief is in the very air we breathe, though all the hearts about us are closed and steeled against God, and all lips speak scornfully of things divine, if *we* only long for a saving touch of Christ it will be given to us. If there is but one person in this sanctuary to-night who has come with a sorrowful, anxious, hungry spirit, wishing and hoping that Christ may meet him here and help him, that one is almost sure to get the help, though in all the congregation there may not be another blessed and strengthened in the same way. Now, look at the miracle—the way in which it was done, and the person.

Here was a man lying on a couch paralysed, perfectly helpless, unable to stand, walk, or move himself in any way, not able to turn over on his bed without the help of nursing hands. One of those nervous cords was diseased or broken which connect the brain and will with the limbs, and the body was like the dead branch of a tree through which the sap has ceased to flow. Total paralysis! That is how doctors express it. And the word suggests something hardly less terrible than death. It is indeed a lingering death, a prolonged pain, a joyless, useless burden to one's self and to one's friends, and no hope of recovery. This man probably had never entertained a hope—a real hope—since they told him the sad fact that he was incurably stricken. He had known that he would never walk again; and that gives point to the story. Christ told him to get up straightway, and stand upon his feet, and carry away his bed, and go to his own house; and, instead of moaning out, "I cannot do it, the thing is impossible," his faith responded to the command. He forgot that he could not do it. He tried to obey, and as he made the effort, the power which enabled him to do it was given. Immediately he arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them all. That was faith healing, if you like. We wish such things could be done now. Some people believe they are. But whether things of precisely that kind are done or not, there is something of the same kind in moral things, and the truth taught here is always true. And the first thing we notice is

I.

That Christ gives men a belief in themselves.

We are surprised that the man should make the attempt at all. That is wonderful that he should have had any belief in the possibility of it. You would rather have expected him to lie groaning and lamenting that he was past all that, that he might as well attempt to fly, or get into a new body, as to stand upon his feet. But no! something had stirred to life the dead hope of the man. The look on Christ's face had done it, or some meaning expression in the tone of His voice. Anyhow, there was a glimmer of hope again. A feeling, well, perhaps I am not so desperately lost as I thought; there is one last chance.

And we see *that* in nearly all the Saviour's miracles. We read of the marvellous way in which He kindled hope in people who had long abandoned hope. He seemed to blow upon the cold dead ashes of hope, and make the ashes aflame again. He looked on men, looked into their searching eyes, spoke to them, and touched them, and they forgot that they were crippled, impotent, incapable, doomed, chained down to their desperate lot, and lost. Another and a better life beckoned to them, and invited them. It was as if they saw their prison's door opening, and a world of liberty and joy waiting for them outside. New possibilities were revealed. They believed in them-

selves. He made the most loathsome lepers believe that they could be made whole, and the filthiest sinners believe that they could be made clean. He made them believe it, because He so thoroughly believed it Himself. They read it in every glance, and heard it in every word. They saw that He did not despair of them, and the next step to that was that they ceased to despair of themselves. For the only way to make people believe that they can be and do better is to show them that you believe it, believe it with all your hearts. Faith begets faith. That was how Jesus worked, and works still. When He comes near He does not talk to us about our inability, our feebleness, and the chains which fasten us down. He sets about persuading us that we can ascend, that faith will make us mighty, that the divine is not far from any one of us, that the power to be and do better things is always within our reach, that we need not despair and must not. Every word that Christ speaks spells hope. Believe in God, He says, and that will make you believe in yourselves. For there is nothing impossible with Him. He can make the most shattered column whole and straight again, and the most broken and wasted life a thing of strength and beauty. Christ taught this man, as He teaches all of us, to attempt good things, by kindling in us new hope, confidence, expectation, and belief in ourselves. "Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thine house."

II.

The second thought is that in attempting difficult and impossible things at Christ's command, we get the power to do them.

Where there is the will, God makes the way. Christ told this man to do what was humanly impossible. Everybody would have said: It cannot be done. Science would have called it a piece of folly. And yet in the very act of obeying, and trying to get up, a superhuman power was given to him, and he surprised himself by doing it. Now, of course you say that was a miracle — a thing extraordinary, exceptional, and quite out of the range of human experience to-day. Nothing like that ever happens now, you say. But you are wrong. Christ intended to teach us by those miracles on men's bodies certain greater things which have to do with mind, heart, morals, and religion. Things quite as unlikely and extraordinary are done in the life of faith. Christ does give men now strength enough to do things which at the first thought of them seem well-nigh impossible. It is true in a thousand ways, that when God clearly bids us do a difficult thing, He bestows upon us the power to accomplish it. We can almost work impossibilities, if we attempt them with a cheerful spirit of obedience, and a determined faith. God is always asking us to do what our weak and frightened hearts shrink from—things which seem beyond our strength. It is much as it was in the

olden time, when He told His people to march through the bed of a sea, or when He told three hundred men to attack and overcome the countless army of Midian. The Bible, in fact, is cram full of stories which tell us how men were ordered to do what no human force and abilities could do. Yet faith attempted them, and faith succeeded. In fact, all men and women who have done great things for God have been surprised with themselves as they looked back. They have said : It is wonderful, it is miraculous. No one would have believed that we could do these things. We would not have believed it ourselves. It was God's power in us that did them. And we have all of us God behind us and within us, if we are willing to make use of Him. And He will give us strength enough to do all that He asks us to do.

We never know what we can do until we try. There is a giant's strength in us which slumbers until God touches it, and faith awakes it, and then it can almost move mountains. Think of the strength which comes out in a weak, tender woman when the needs of some sick husband or child call for it. God says to her, or her own loving heart says it, and it is the same thing, Nurse that helpless one day and night through his long illness : and she sets to her task, with a prayer for God's help. And He does help her mightily. Every sick chamber where some sufferer passes through a long crisis, and needs incessant help and watching, with perhaps only one to do it, is a place where miracles are wrought. God says to the wife or mother, Do without rest and sleep until the crisis is past. It is your duty And, though the

thing is physically impossible, she does it, because in attempting it, God gives her superhuman strength. Think how people pass through seasons of crushing, heart-breaking loss, sorrow, bereavement, when every dear hope is broken. God says to them: Go through these deep waters, be brave, do not yield to despair. And they do it. They do not break down. God works a miracle for them.

Hannah More saw in a country village a number of labourers' children, the most neglected, abandoned, precociously wicked children that she had ever seen. All the squires, parsons, and farmers of the district told her that she might as well attempt to convert pigs, or change dung into pearls, as attempt to reform and convert them. God told her to do it, and she set about the work. The impossible came to pass. A miracle was done. Those children were transformed into orderly, gentle, sweet-hearted Christians. Some of you say you cannot love God, or you cannot love some of your neighbours, or you cannot forgive that man who has done you a grievous wrong, or you cannot face that trouble which threatens you, or you cannot bear that cross which is laid upon you. God tells you to do it. Try, with an earnest prayer on your lips, and you will do it, though it seems so hard. Napoleon used to say that he could not find the word "impossible" in his dictionary. He did not believe that there was such a thing. There is no word "impossible" in the dictionary which God has written for us.

Some of you are quite sure that you were not destined to be good men and women—Christian men and women. The Christian life, you say, is far too

big and grand a thing for you—you like some other things too well, or you are weak of purpose, or your unchristian habits are too firmly fixed, or your surroundings and companionships make it impossible. You might as well try to ascend on wings as become a follower of Christ, and a witness for Christ in the place where you live and work. That is what you say. The thing cannot be done. It is impossible. But that impossible is a cowardly word, and a stupid, illogical word too, if you have never earnestly made the attempt. Try with all your hearts; try, with many a prayer for help on your lips; try for at least a few weeks, and not just for an hour or a day. And then, if you fail, it will be because God's promises have failed, and you may then honestly write the word impossible. But give God a chance. He will not let you fail. The strength comes when it is needed. He does not give it until it is needed. If you resolve on the Christian life, it will be made possible for you, for you will not carry into it just your own weak will and feeble human resources; you will carry some of His omnipotence with you. He says: Get up, stand upon your feet, walk as the children of light; and as soon as you begin to obey the word, the help comes which makes the thing possible.

There is the whole story of the Christian life told in the experience of that paralytic.

THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER

By Rev. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.

THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER

MATTHEW viii. 1-4. Compare MARK i. 40-45; LUKE v. 12-16.

IT will help us in realising the full significance of our Lord's cleansing of the leper, if we begin by noticing one or two facts regarding the disease from which he was suffering.

Much controversy has arisen as to how far the leprosy of the Bible is to be identified with what is now known as "true leprosy," and it has been held that the former, while presenting many of the same repulsive features, was by no means so deep-seated or irrecoverable as the latter. But while the Biblical name "leprosy" may well have been a generic term, covering various forms of skin disease, it is certain that the disease now called leprosy was also known in Scripture times, and could hardly have escaped notice.

Upon its precise nature it is unnecessary to enlarge, nor is anything gained by reproducing the loathsome details of its insidious progress. Enough that it was literally what it came to be regarded symbolically, a living death. The man seized with it was compelled to put on the usual signs of mourning for the dead,

the bare head, the rent clothes, the covered lips. And so rigidly was he shut off from the companionship of his fellows, that he had to give them timely warning of his approach by the cry, "Unclean! Unclean!"

This latter provision was doubtless prompted partly by sanitary and medical considerations. The Jews regarded leprosy as contagious, and in this they have been confirmed by recent observation, though it would appear that the disease is not communicated very easily, and rarely by simple contact. But the mere fear of infection cannot explain all the elaborate provisions for the separation and cleansing of lepers contained in the Levitical Law (Leviticus xiii., xiv). These are clearly to a large extent religious in their character, and are due to the fact that leprosy was specially selected as symbolic of the divine wrath against all uncleanness. The man suffering from it was treated as ceremonially unclean, unable to share in the privileges of God's covenant, and unfit for the society of His holy people.

We can easily see how readily in consequence leprosy came to be used in the Christian Church as the type of sin in general, though it ought to be noted that it is never directly so spoken of in the Bible itself. The nearest approach is in Psalm li. 7, where, with evident reference to the cleansing of the leper, the Psalmist prays, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." But from the time of the Fathers, the comparison is a favourite one, and it is obvious how naturally it lends itself to homiletic treatment. In its insidious beginning, in its gradual and increasingly repulsive growth, and in its fatal ending, the fell disease presents only

too significant points of contact with the power and progress of evil: while the means prescribed for its ceremonial cleansing may easily be shown to be emblematic of the restoration and renewal of the sinner.

In considering, accordingly, the case of the leper in the passage before us, we are dealing with one who, from this point of view, may well be regarded as representative of ourselves in our sinful and outcast state. And in his cure, notwithstanding the generally hopeless character of his malady, we are led to look for the same healing and life to One who can still be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and who is "able to save to the uttermost all them that draw near unto God through Him" (Hebrews iv. 15; vii. 25).

That this miracle made a deep impression on the mind of the Early Church is proved by the fact that it is related by all the Synoptic writers, and that, too, in nearly identical terms. They introduce it, however, in somewhat different connections. In St Matthew, it follows immediately on the account of the Sermon on the Mount. In St Mark it is simply placed without any definite note of time during the course of the second Galilean journey. And in St Luke, its position is evidently determined not so much by the time of its actual occurrence as by the Evangelist's well-known principles of historic grouping.

The exact locality of its occurrence is left equally indeterminate. The first two Evangelists make no mention of place at all while the third says merely that it was "in one of the cities" of Galilee through

which the Lord was passing. But as lepers were strictly forbidden to enter any camp or town, the words must be interpreted generally as pointing to some spot immediately outside the walls. It is remarkable that even there, the leper should have ventured to draw near to the Saviour, surrounded as He would be by a great multitude. And an explanation has been sought in the fact on which St Luke again lays stress, that the man was "full of leprosy." His disease, that is, had reached such dimensions that he came under the strange provision of the law: "If the leprosy break out abroad in the skin, and the leprosy cover all the skin of him that hath the plague, from his head even to his feet... then the priest... shall pronounce him clean that hath the plague" (Leviticus xiii. 12, 13). But this exemption, though possible, is hardly likely in the case before us. And the leper's defiance of all the obstacles that human callousness had placed in his pathway was probably due simply to the eager faith which marks all his conduct, and which could not rest until it found itself in the immediate presence of the great Healer. And this faith is the more remarkable when we remember that as yet there had been no instance of the cleansing of a leper in the course of the Judæan or Galilean ministry, and that in view of the light in which his disease was generally regarded by his fellow-countrymen, the poor sufferer might well have thought himself to be outside the ranges of the Saviour's healing power. But no! on whatever his trust was founded, there could be no doubt as to its reality and persistence. The leper did not wait to be called, or

to be brought, but himself taking the initiative, he came to Jesus, beseeching Him, and kneeling down to Him (St Mark) and worshipping (St Matthew), until at length he prostrated himself on his face before Him with the cry, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean."

The words are often quoted as indicating that the man's faith in Christ's compassion was not equal to his faith in His power. He was convinced that Christ was able, but he was not so sure that He was willing to heal.* But this is to put an unnecessarily harsh construction on the clause, "if Thou wilt." The words may point with equal readiness to an entire and implicit confidence which cast itself upon Christ, knowing that He both could and would do the very best to meet its need. Nor was it disappointed. The triumphant faith was met with a triumphant reward. Moved with compassion for the lonely outcast at His feet, the Saviour "stretched forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou made clean."

The "touch" of Jesus on this occasion is recalled by all the three Evangelists. It was, perhaps, the feature of the whole cleansing that most arrested at the moment the attention of the onlookers, as it would certainly go straight home to the heart of the leper himself. Ever since his dire malady had seized him, he had been wholly removed from contact with his fellow-men. At that very moment the surrounding spectators would be drawing hurriedly back, lest by the mere touch of his garment they should be defiled.

* A suggestive contrast may be found in the attitude of the father of the epileptic boy (Mark ix. 22), and in our Lord's varied treatment of the two cases.

But Jesus had no such fear. He was the perfectly Pure One, to whom all things were pure. And setting aside, according to His wont, the mere letter of the Mosaic Law for its spirit, or rather substituting for the outward law the eternal and divine law of compassion, He by His touch broke down the barriers by which hitherto the leper had been surrounded, and restored him to his lost fellowship with God and man. For the act was accompanied, as we have seen, by a redeeming and creative word. "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean," the leper had asked in humble submission. And the very words of his prayer supplied the words of the Saviour's answer, as promptly there came back the comforting assurance, from which the very idea of an "if" was banished: "I will, be thou made clean." And "straightway"—and the word again finds a place in all these accounts—"his leprosy was cleansed."

The cure was evidently thorough and complete. There was no mere pronouncing clean on Christ's part of a man cleansed already, but who desired to be saved the troublesome and expensive journey to Jerusalem to see the priests. Nor did Christ only prepare the way for a recovery that was to be effected later through ordinary natural processes. But He cleansed the man there and then. During His later ministry, owing to the imperfect faith of those on whom they were wrought, the Saviour's miracles were sometimes more gradual. But where, as in the case before us, He met with a ready and responsive faith, the cure was worked with a corresponding spontaneity and gladness.

But not yet was Jesus done with the man. "And

Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them." Similar injunctions to silence are not infrequent during the earlier stages of the Galilean ministry (see, for example, Matthew ix. 30; xii. 16; Mark i. 34.); but on the present occasion the charge was enforced, as we learn more particularly from St Mark, with an emphasis and sternness which are very remarkable, "And He gave him a strict injunction, and straightway sent him out, and saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man" (Mark i. 43, 44).

It may have been in the interests of His own future work that the Lord demanded this reticence from the leper. He did not wish His ministry to be accompanied by undue noise and excitement, as He feared might be the case when the people heard of so great a miracle. And besides, it was never His aim to compel belief by means of the wonders that He wrought, but rather to attract men to Himself through the quiet ministry of the Word.

Others, again, have supposed that the charge arose rather out of Christ's relation to the priests. He desired that they should hear of the miracle first of all from the cleansed man himself, and so be convinced of its reality. And still more was He anxious to take away from them all possible ground of asserting that He had set Himself up against the Law. It was not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it that He had come (Matthew v. 17). And how could He prove that better than by requiring this man whom He had just miraculously cured to refrain from holding intercourse with others until he had first gone to the properly

constituted legal authorities in order to be pronounced clean?

But while these several reasons had all probably their weight with Jesus, it is impossible to doubt that in laying this charge He was thinking also of the man's own state. Naturally excited and elated by his miraculous cure, he required time and quiet for realising the full extent of the blessing that had been conferred upon him, and were he at once to constitute himself the messenger of what had happened to others, there was grave danger that his own inward happiness would be dissipated. What could be better for him, then, than the solitary journey to Jerusalem, and the tribute of respect to the faith in which he had been brought up?

But, if so, the Saviour's gracious provision for His new follower's needs was set arbitrarily aside, and that by the man himself. For with a deliberate disobedience that is very surprising, he neither kept silence nor went to the priests. "But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to spread abroad the whole matter." He thought, doubtless, that in so doing he was best honouring Jesus, and that his conduct would be not only excused but commended, in view of the fresh glory with which he would surround his Benefactor. But to say nothing of the injury that he thereby did to his own immature discipleship, this self-willed blunderer succeeded only in inflicting a serious check on his Master's cause. For the result was, as Jesus Himself had foreseen: "He could no more openly enter into a city, but was without in desert places" (Mark i. 45). So great is the danger attending disobedience, however well-intentioned the motive from which it may spring.

THE HEALING OF THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

By Rev. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.

THE HEALING OF THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

MATTHEW viii. 5-13 ; LUKE vii. 1-10.

TWO preliminary points demand our attention.

1. *It has been maintained that this miracle is identical with the healing of the nobleman's son recorded in St John iv.* 46-53.

And it is true that along with a general similarity in the narratives, both miracles took place at Capernaum, and in both Jesus exercised His power at a distance. But when we come to look more particularly into the details, the differences are too great to permit of the miracles being identified. The subject of the Johannine miracle was a son ; in the case before us he was a servant or slave. And while here the petitioner was a heathen soldier, there he was probably a Jew. Nor was the faith of the father in the former miracle, as interpreted by the Lord, so strong as the faith of the soldier in the latter, and consequently it was answered in a different way. On these grounds, then, and others might be adduced, we

are justified in regarding the two miracles as complementary rather than identical. "In the one, weak faith is disciplined and confirmed; in the other, strong faith is rewarded and glorified." (Westcott.)

2. *But even when this is admitted, it is further said that the two accounts of the second miracle in the first and third Gospels respectively are inconsistent with each other.*

St Matthew represents the Centurion as coming himself to the Lord with his request. St Luke represents him as making it through the elders of the Jews. And similarly, while in St Matthew the Centurion puts forward his own plea of unworthiness to receive Christ into his house, in St Luke he is again found employing the mediation of friends. But such apparent discrepancies, even if not wholly reconcilable by the old law-maxim, that what one does by means of another, he does himself,* simply show that the first Evangelist had not received such a full and complete account of the occurrence as the third, and that in his more abbreviated narrative he naturally passed over all mention of the interposing messengers, and represented everything as taking place directly between Jesus and the Centurion. And though these and similar variations in the evangelic records make it impossible to ascribe to their writers supernatural and infallible accuracy in every particular, there is certainly nothing here to militate against their general credibility. On the contrary, such independence in insignificant details is better proof of the historicity of the story than exact verbal correspondence would have been.

* *Qui facit per alium, facit per se.*

To pass, then, without further introduction to the story itself, the course of events was as follows. From the Mount of Beatitudes Jesus had retired to Capernaum, which He had come to regard as His own city; but it was not to rest. Multitudes came to Him from all parts, and amongst those who sought His aid was a certain Centurion, the captain of a troop stationed at Capernaum, perhaps in the Roman service, but more probably in the service of Herod Antipas. This man had at home a servant "sick of the palsy, grievously tormented," according to St Matthew (viii. 6); and though, strangely enough, St Luke, the physician-apostle, does not specify so exactly the nature of the disease, its gravity is shown by his note that the man was "at the point of death," while he adds the further touching particular that he was "held in honour" or "held dear" by his master (vii. 2). In itself this is a significant trait in the Centurion's character. A regard for their servants' interests was by no means a common feature in the pagan nations of antiquity, and amongst the Jews mourning for slaves was actually forbidden in the Talmud. But this man—and it is interesting to notice in passing that all the Centurions who come before us in the New Testament are honourably mentioned (see Luke xxiii. 47; Acts x. 22; xxvii. 3, 43)—had conceived a warm affection for this lad, and hearing that Jesus was in Capernaum, he "sent unto Him elders of the Jews, asking Him that He would come and save his servant" (Luke vii. 3). It is not stated why he did not go in person, but the fact that he was a heathen by birth (Luke vii. 9), and not even, though this is often assumed, a Jewish prose-

lyte,* may have led him to imagine that this deputation of leading Jewish citizens would have greater weight with Jesus than he himself would have had. In any case his cause did not suffer in their hands, for they, "when they came to Jesus, besought Him earnestly, saying, He is worthy that Thou shouldest do this for him: for he loveth our nation, and himself built us our synagogue" (Luke vii. 4, 5).

The tribute is very remarkable, and we would gladly know what had specially led this heathen soldier to interest himself so much in the Jewish religion. But on this point the Evangelists are wholly silent. And we can only conjecture that, wearied with the vanities of the old heathen religions, he had come to admire and reverence the worship of the one true God, and had taken the best means in his power of encouraging it by building that synagogue, of which travellers think that they can still find traces at the modern Tell Hûm, generally thought to represent the ancient Capernaum.

But even more striking than the Centurion's liberality was his humility, for no sooner had he heard that his request was granted, and that Jesus was on His way to the house, than he sent a second deputation, this time of some of his friends, deprecating the trouble to which he had already put Jesus, and pointing out that an actual visit was

* Had the Centurion been actually a proselyte it would hardly have said of him that he "loved" the Jewish nation, or was "unfit" to receive Jesus into his house (Luke vii. 5, 6). And it is further noteworthy that the expressions usually applied to proselytes in the New Testament are wanting in his case (compare Acts x. 2, 22, 35; xiii. 16, 26).

not necessary in order to accomplish His purpose: "Lord, cease to trouble Thyself; for I am not fit that Thou shouldest come under my roof." Primarily, the Centurion may have been pointing to the fact, that, as a Gentile, he was ceremonially unfit to receive a Jew into his house, since the houses of Gentiles were considered as defiling those who entered them. But there can be no doubt that he was also giving expression to the deep-seated sense of personal unworthiness that separated him from the sinless Redeemer. For he continued: "Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy"—a different expression, though this is unfortunately lost sight of in the Authorised Version—"to come unto Thee: but say with a word, and let my servant be healed" (Luke vii. 6, 7).

It may be that the Centurion had already heard of how Jesus, by His mere fiat, had healed the son of the nobleman at Capernaum. But that detracts little or nothing from this exhibition of his own faith, and the grounds on which he justifies it are entirely his own, and reveal "the wisdom of his faith, beautifully shining out in the bluffness of the soldier" (Bengel). "For I also am a man set under authority, having under myself soldiers: and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it" (Luke vii. 8). "I know," that is, "from personal experience what a word from one in authority can do. A subordinate myself, under the authority of my superior officers, I render them an obedient service, just as I demand the same from those who in their turn are placed under me. If then I, who am an

inferior, can thus give effective orders, how much more canst Thou accomplish, who hast proved Thyself more than man, and who hast authority over the unseen powers? In Thy case, surely, a word is enough that this sickness may be healed."

"And when Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned and said unto the multitude that followed Him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Luke vii. 9). Only on two occasions in the Gospels do we read of Jesus' wonder; here, where it was called forth by the Centurion's faith, and at Nazareth, where it was due to His former fellow-townsmen's unbelief (Mark vi. 6). And both notices are significant, if only as bringing home to us the reality of the Saviour's humanity. For if He was perfect God, He was also perfect Man; and, in consequence, there was a sense, however inexplicable it may be to us, in which He was limited as to His omniscience (compare Mark xiii. 32), and could marvel at what He discovered among men. And certainly, on the present occasion, there was enough to arouse amazement. Never before had Jesus encountered a faith such as this, even amongst the chosen people, with all their privileges. Who of them had shown himself willing to believe that He could heal without being personally present? And yet, as Jesus went on to point out, this Gentile soldier was only an outstanding example of what would frequently occur in later days. "And I say unto you"—Jews, children of the seed of Abraham, and therefore the natural heirs of the promises—"that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham,

and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew viii. 11, 12).* Or, in the other words, contrary to the general Jewish expectation that in the world to come the Gentiles would be put to shame at the sight of the Jews in bliss, it would be the Jews who would gnash their teeth when they found the kingdom of which they had proved themselves unworthy taken from them, and "given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew xxi. 43). Nor would this bliss be confined to a few; it would be bestowed upon "many" gathered in from different quarters of the globe, and therefore belonging to all nations. And amongst these, so Jesus clearly implied, the heathen Centurion would be found occupying an honoured place. In him, the humble oleaster, to borrow St Augustine's figure, there had been found what was wanting in the proud olive. And as a present and convincing proof of this, "Jesus said unto the Centurion"—or to him in his messengers—"Go thy way; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And the servant was healed in that hour" (Matthew viii. 13); or, according to St Luke's account, was not only cured of the disease from which he had been suffering, but was "whole," "in good health" (vii. 10).

It is unnecessary to draw out at length the lessons we may learn from this wonderful miracle. They lie on the surface of the narrative we have been

* St Luke omits these words in the present connection, but inserts them elsewhere, chap. xiii. 28, 29.

considering. Looked at in its relation to our Lord Himself, the whole story forms one of the most striking examples in the rich pages of the Gospels, alike of the Saviour's sympathy and of His power, a sympathy that was extended even to the bond-servant of a heathen soldier, and a power that was exercised apart from His personal presence. Looked at in its relation to the Centurion, it brings before us a man with a mind "naturally Christian," who, notwithstanding the circumstances of his birth and upbringing, exercised a greatness of faith unequalled in Israel. And so, looked at still further in relation to ourselves, it may well put us to shame that, with our still greater opportunities, we have so often failed to turn them to proper account, and thereby serve as yet another solemn reminder of our Lord's constantly repeated warning: "Behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last" (Luke xiii. 30).

THE DEMONIAC IN THE SYNAGOGUE AT CAPERNAUM

By Rev. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.

THE DEMONIAC IN THE SYNAGOGUE AT CAPERNAUM

MARK i. 21-28 ; LUKE iv. 31-37.

BY St Matthew the cleansing of the leper is placed first amongst our Lord's miracles, but St Mark and St Luke agree in assigning that position to the miracle now before us, and both describe very clearly when and where it took place. Rejected at Nazareth, Jesus had taken refuge in Capernaum, and on the first Sabbath of His stay followed His usual practice of attending the service in the synagogue. This was, in all probability, the synagogue provided by the liberality of the Centurion whose servant Jesus afterwards healed (Luke vii. 1-10), and it was doubtless crowded by an eager multitude, anxious to see and to hear this new Teacher for themselves. "And they were astonished at His teaching," not merely at what He said, but at "the authority" with which He spoke (Mark i. 22). It was so different from what they had been accustomed to. Their own scribes never put forward an opinion of their own but supported all they said by an appeal to some earlier or greater authority—"Rabbi Hillel said this," or "Rabbi Shammai that," or "So I heard from Shemaia and

Abtalim." But Jesus quoted no "authorities." He did not even, like the Old Testament prophets, refer everything to God, "Thus saith the Lord"; but with an authority derived directly from God, He spoke straight from the heart to the heart, "Verily, I say unto you."

And the authority Christ claimed for His words He established also by means of His deeds, as the present occasion was clearly to prove.

There was in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, or, as St Luke expresses it, having "a spirit of an unclean devil." It is not easy to say how in these circumstances he had been allowed to enter the synagogue at all. He may have crept in unobserved, or the evil spirit may for a time have been lying dormant, only to be roused into new activity by the very presence of Christ. "Antipathy," it has been truly said, "is no less clear-sighted than sympathy." And in the unique holiness of Jesus, the spirit could not fail to recognise an essentially hostile power to his own evil dominion. "And he cried out with a loud voice, Ah! what have we"—classing other evil spirits along with himself—"to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art Thou come to destroy us? I"—speaking now out of the fulness of his personal experience—"know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God" (Luke iv. 33, 34).

The words can hardly be an unwilling testimony to the truth, or Christ would not have silenced him as He did. Nor is it necessary (with Archbishop Trench) to see in them a deliberate attempt to do harm, and to bring the truth itself into suspicion and discredit, through receiving its attestation from the

spirit of lies. Are they not rather the expression of an abject fear that felt its own evil sway already slipping from its grasp, and was constrained to admit itself to be in the presence of its conqueror? Between Jesus, wholly consecrated to God's service, and the spirits whose rule was of the devil, there was nothing in common, nor could there be any truce. Jesus, in the exercise of His healing mission, might save others: them He could only destroy.

"And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him" (Luke iv. 35). The twofold command was designed to meet the twofold offence. The spirit's confession, though in itself true, could not be accepted as coming from unholy lips (compare Mark i. 34; iii. 12). The invasion of the poor victim's spirit by an alien power must now be ended. And the spirit had no course but to obey, though in doing so he displayed his utmost malice to the sufferer. "Convulsing him, and crying with a loud voice, he came out of him" (Mark i. 26). Or, as St Luke in substantial agreement expresses it, "When the devil had thrown him down in the midst, he came out of him, having done him no hurt" (Luke iv. 35).

The immediate effect of so wonderful a deliverance was very great. And St Mark, in his usual graphic style, has recalled for us the incoherent remarks of the excited crowd: "What is this? a new teaching! with authority He commandeth even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him" (Mark i. 27). They had witnessed, doubtless, the elaborate processes which their own exorcists adopted in dealing with victims similarly possessed (compare Matthew xii. 27; Acts xix. 13). But never before had they seen a cure

effected by the simple word of a direct command. And immediately, from that hour, the fame of the new Teacher and Healer spread in every direction (Mark i. 28; Luke iv. 37).

It is impossible to discuss here at length the difficult subject of demoniacal possession as it meets us in the Gospels, but one or two points suggested by the special instance now before us may be noted.

Thus there is a very common tendency nowadays to argue that as the Jews were in the habit of attributing all disease, and especially all mental disease, to the immediate action of evil spirits, it is unnecessary to see in this particular class of cases anything more than lunacy, epilepsy, and the like. But without denying that the Evangelists' language may have often been coloured by the prevailing beliefs of their time, no one can study their statements impartially without feeling that they themselves were thinking of something more than merely mental or nervous disease. Thus, in the present instance, St Mark's words rendered literally are that the man was "in an unclean spirit" (Mark i. 23), moving in a sphere in which an unclean spirit held sway; and though the exact interpretation of St Luke's unique phrase, "having a spirit of an unclean devil" (Luke iv. 33), is uncertain, it equally implies that the man was under the influence of an alien spirit. And in other cases it is noteworthy that an express distinction is drawn between the physical disease and the demoniacal possession which was often superimposed on it, as when we read of "a dumb man possessed with a devil" (Matthew ix. 32), or of "one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb" (Matthew xii. 22).

So, too, when we pass from the descriptions of the disease to the cures effected. Not only are we told generally that "Jesus healed many that were sick with divers diseases, and cast out many devils" (Mark i. 34; compare Matthew iv. 24, Luke iv. 40-41; vii. 21), but, as in the present instance, we find Him expressly addressing the spirit as distinct from the patient, "Hold thy peace, and come out of him" (Mark i. 25).

Unless, therefore, we are prepared to fall back upon the wholly unworthy theory, that Jesus went through the form of casting out demons though He knew that there were no demons to be cast out, in accommodation to the erroneous beliefs of His contemporaries, it seems impossible to deny that in this and similar cases we have a real usurpation of authority over the spirit of man by an evil spirit. The victim was literally "possessed." An alien power had entered into him, ruling and oppressing him, without, however, destroying his own personality which remained intact, awaiting the Deliverer.

And if it be argued that we have no longer any experience of such phenomena now, it is probably sufficient to point to the natural relation in which they stand to the period in which they occur. That was "the hour and power of darkness," when, by the very coming of the Redeemer, the spirits of evil were aroused into fresh and feverish activity. But it was also the darkest hour before the dawn; and in the triumphant assurance of the Seventy that even the devils were subject unto them in His name, Jesus Himself saw the earnest of the complete overthrow of their chief: "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven" (Luke x. 18).

CHRIST THE HEALER

Peter's Wife's Mother

By the Very Rev.
Principal ALEXANDER STEWART, D.D.

CHRIST THE HEALER

Peter's Wife's Mother

"But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her. And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them."—Mark i. 30-1.

When any incident contains a supernatural element, we are apt to feel that it is by that very fact so far removed from the range of ordinary experience that we dwell upon it with reluctance, and scarcely expect to find it helpful and instructive with reference to daily life and daily duties. With the exception of the great facts of Incarnation and Resurrection which lie at the very root and foundation of our Lord's person and work, which mould, indeed, all our conceptions of Christian doctrine and Christian life, we shrink somewhat from recognising a relation to ourselves in whatever partakes of the miraculous; we feel as though a great gulf were set between ourselves and those to whom miracle was a frequent experience. We sigh as we reflect that the sick-beds by which we watch so long and tearfully are not as those by which Jesus spoke the words of healing and power. It seems small comfort to us as we follow the

remains of our beloved ones to the grave that He once stood by the grave of Lazarus, and restored to the sisters of Bethany the brother whom they mourned; or that He stopped the mournful procession near the gates of the city of Nain, and gave back life to him who was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. At the most, such incidents reveal to us One who has the keys of death and the grave, and fill us with such assurance as Martha had even before the miracle—"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." For us the ravages of disease and the pangs of dissolution are lightened only (glorious hope though it is!) by the hope of immortality.

The miracles of Jesus, however, even those which in outward circumstance are least impressive, have for us most important lessons, and are susceptible of immediate, almost instinctive, applications. And this in two ways. They are rays emanating from the source of divine glory, illustrations of the character of Christ, examples of His method of work, emblems and symbols of the kingdom which He founded. And, on the other hand, they are *parables in act*, illustrating for us the action of spiritual forces, pictures of events which are continually going on in the sphere of the higher life. Considered in this light, we perceive that acts which were beyond the power of other men were but the fit accompaniments of a character and life so unique, so lofty, so divine. We perceive that they are indispensable elements of that teaching which was given to make the world wise.

There are few incidents in the Gospel history which seem less to invite comment than that

narrated in the text. Apart from the marvel which arrests attention and manifests the Saviour's extraordinary power, there at first sight appears nothing about it but what is of private interest. True, it is thought worthy of mention by three Evangelists, but this, we might suppose, was because it happened in the household of Peter, who early assumed and long maintained the position of leadership among the Twelve. An event connected with him, for the extraordinary character of which he could vouch, and which had doubtless no inconsiderable effect in forming and establishing his own faith, was on that account alone deserving of record. But beyond this, it may be asked how it differs from the numerous unspecified miracles which are summed up in the verses immediately succeeding?—"And at even when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew Him."

We shall best answer such questions by a closer consideration of the whole incident, and in what I have to say, I wish to bear in mind the two aspects of such deeds which have been already mentioned —that they are, that is, illustrations of Christ's character, and symbols of His kingdom, and that they picture spiritual processes, teaching us how God deals with human souls.

It seems, then, not without significance, that by two of the Evangelists this miracle in the house

is placed immediately after the healing of a man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue of Capernaum. The latter, it is evident, was a public act, performed in the place where men were assembled for worship, a challenge, therefore, to the people, their teachers and rulers, calling their attention to the advent of the kingdom of God, and revealing some of its characteristic features. That Christ's habitual humanity, sympathy, and pity moved Him even here, there can be no doubt; the man with the unclean spirit was grievously afflicted; his malady was shown in self-inflicted pain and violence. Such a case could not fail to awaken the compassion of Jesus, and make Him long to afford relief. But also, in the circumstances, He could not but recognise it as a providentially afforded opportunity for proclaiming His divine message and entering upon His higher work. In the restored maniac, the people could not fail to see the manifestation of a power of healing, of beneficence and blessing. But the incident in the house of Simon is plainly due to the sentiment of pity rather than to the necessity of teaching. It does teach, but this is not its primary purpose. We see here Christ not only in the church, but in the home—fit emblem of the work He was to do, and the influence He was to exert. There are great institutions from which living Christianity is inseparable—the day of rest, the church, public worship, common prayer and praise. Round these our Christian life centres; from these it draws much of its nourishment. But it is not confined to these. It is designed to bless the home, to sanctify labour, to permeate every hope and joy of man. To those

in the synagogue Jesus was the great teacher, to those in the house He was the personal friend—and He brought a blessing to the one as to the other. As distinctly as on some occasions He declined to make His wonder-working powers the mere instruments of selfish and worldly gratification to those who thought relationship or friendship gave them some claim upon Him, even so readily did He respond to the claims of friendship urged in humility and faith. His was not the pretended impartiality which does injustice to friendship lest it should concede overmuch. Christ recognised the claims even of earthly affection—"Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep"—and to Simon's wife's mother, He extended the healing touch.

It has been justly observed that "the very humbleness of the occurrence deeply attracts us." In outward circumstance, as has been already said, it is not impressive; it does not seem a "mighty work." But all the more it is seen to be a *kindly* work; it takes away the anxiety of a household, it gives health for sickness, joy for sorrow, light for darkness. The very obscurity of it sets in greater emphasis its power and glory. The mightiest in the universe is condescending to the lowliest.

Jesus, let us remember, was calling away Simon Peter to be His follower in His life of hardship and trial. The future Apostle was to leave all and follow his Lord and Master. Before doing so, his anxiety on account of those left behind is to be mercifully allayed. A day of family rejoicing is to prepare for the days of family separation and sacrifice. Will not

He who can restore health by a touch, watch over the loved ones and guard them from harm? Has not He, whose goodness has made blessed, the best claims on the service of grateful love? Through many a weary day the memory of that joyful hour will sustain their hearts when ready otherwise to sink with disappointment and sorrow. It is surely of great importance that those who are called to higher duties should be set free from lower cares. To have passed through sorrow, enables us more intelligently to sympathise, but in the hour of anguish how can we feel the pain of other grief besides our own? All the thought and anxiety which inseparably attend the little worries wherewith life is so full, distract the attention and undermine the strength which should be set to the accomplishment of life's great tasks. Christ's way is, first, to set at rest the present fears, and then to issue the summons, Follow Me. All unnecessary anxiety after that is a looking back after having put the hand to the plough. If we have troubles and cares belonging to the sphere of ordinary life and interfering with our higher vocation, let us first strive to rid ourselves of these, by casting our care upon God who careth for us, and then let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

In the sickness spoken of in the text, we have an example of the way in which bodily infirmities and temporal calamities are made, in the providence of God, means of leading us into higher blessings. Blessings in themselves they do not seem to be, and may not be. But there are worse things than sickness and earthly loss, which may be made indeed the channel of God's best gifts. "Jesus said to His disciples,

Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." The tried one himself may come to say with one of the olden saints, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Except through sickness this household of Capernaum had never so clearly known the healing power of Jesus. God, we may be sure, never takes away from us one gift without being ready to give, if we are ready to receive it, a higher gift than that which He takes away. "We glory in tribulations also" — says the Apostle — "knowing that tribulation worketh patience." It is possible to serve God even on a sick-bed, by the patience and resignation exhibited, by bringing our humbled and chastened hearts to trace the meaning of His dealings with us, by submitting ourselves unreservedly to His training and educating hand.

Observe what the friends of the sick woman did— "Anon they tell Him of her." "Anon" is an old English word, now only used in poetry, and means *immediately*, *straightway*. They lost no time in communicating to Jesus her serious state. St Matthew's account of the incident would lead us to suppose that He needed no telling. "When Jesus was come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever." But St Matthew's whole account is briefer and less precise. From the other two Evangelists we learn that Jesus, as He approached the house, or immediately upon entering it, encountered pale, anxious faces, and had troubled words addressed to Him, which made Him aware how things stood. They told Him, we may believe, not only as the possible healer, but as the assured

friend and sympathiser. They *told* Him ; they did not leave Him to find it out if He could, prepared, if He failed to bring help and comfort, to blame Him rather than themselves for the omission. They told Him ; it was not a case of every one leaving it to his neighbour, with the inevitable result that nothing would be done ; but each made it his own business independently of the others. They told Him *immediately.* They did not go to Him as a last resort, when every other means had been tried and found wanting. Their grief was too intense and sincere to brook delay.

It is true, my friends, that our Heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him, true that we have an High Priest who is not untouched with the feeling of our infirmities—but all that is not to prevent, rather to encourage, us to approach the throne of grace to seek help in every time of need. Prayer is a divine necessity—beneficial for us, acceptable before God. What is worth having is worth asking for ; and the heart that has not looked for the blessing is not likely to be overflowing with gratitude when it is bestowed. We must pray—pray for ourselves—pray for others. With what moving supplication, with what intensity of sympathy and pain, would these friends of the household tell Jesus of the woman whose weakness or perhaps delirium prevented her from seeking help on her own behalf! St Luke says, "They besought Him for her." And the Saviour was only willing to hear, only ready to answer.

St Mark's Gospel is traditionally believed to have been written partly at the dictation, and entirely

under the supervision, of St Peter himself. Hence, doubtless, many of the minute touches which we find in his descriptions of incidents with which St Peter has to do. How vividly and tenderly, for example, every stage in the action of Jesus on this occasion is depicted! After many years the scene as then enacted was still retained in the storehouse of memory. "And He came, and took her by the hand, and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her."

He came.—He did not always come at once. In the case of Martha and Mary, Jesus, after being sent for, "abode two days where He was." It is ours to go to Him entreating: it is His to determine the time and manner of His coming. But do we always recognise Him when He comes? Do we not often have our own ideas as to the manner of His approach? Are we not often blind to His presence, deaf to His voice? We speak about faith in Him, yet how little do we trust Him, and even when, driven by our need, we earnestly seek Him, we are apt to think that help delayed is necessarily help refused!

He took her by the hand.—In general in His miracles He speaks the words in accordance with which the result is produced. But here He seems to have uttered no word. Silent and still, the work is effected by a sign. But what a sign! He took her by the hand. Symbol of helpfulness all the world over! We hear of men being lost through having no one "to take them by the hand." And doubtless many, through timely help, have risen to fame and fortune, and to much that is better than these who, without it, had lived and died obscure. And Jesus would take all men by the hand, to guide them in life's

devious paths, to uphold them in times of weakness, to show them affection and tenderness when their heart was faint and failing, to cheer them with a sense of His presence, and bid them look upward and press onward. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Why? "For Thou art with me"—I hold Thy hand, I hear Thy voice, I can all but see Thy face—"Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

He lifted her up.—No longer weak and prostrate, that life-giving touch had thrilled her with the sense of new strength. The strength she had now was not her own, it was *imparted.* A new life, from the Lord and Giver of life, coursed in her veins. He did not leave her until He had helped her to realise this new life and strength. The power of the Gospel, it has been observed, is shown in enabling men to stand morally erect. The burdens of sin removed, the numb helplessness resulting from evil habits counteracted, conscience quickened and purified, we become new creatures in Christ Jesus. The old things for us—the delusions of our fevered visions—pass away, and all things become new.

Immediately the fever left her.—Prompt as had been the appeal is the help afforded. There was no gradual recovery, no period of convalescence. God works quickly when He will, and He will make His work complete. The change of her former state was seen in that the hitherto afflicted woman arose and ministered unto them. She made use of her restored strength in the duties which lay to her hand. She deemed that she would best show her gratitude by active and lowly service. We

know of no words which she spoke, we can but guess at the thoughts and feelings that surged through mind and heart. But her life was eloquent —she gave of what she had, she did what she could —"Freely ye have received, freely give."

As an image of spiritual experience, this narrative is suggestive enough. Dire is the moral sickness which affects the whole race of man—whether it takes the form of the fever of passion and ambition, or the chill of indifference and apathy. The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. Let us apply for ourselves at the great Source of health and healing. Let us call upon the Lord to help and save. He will hear when we cry, He will come when we call. And if there are any unconscious of their sad and perilous state, let us pray for them. The prayer of faith shall save the sick —and who so wretched as the sick in mind and heart?

And if we have experienced His mercy; if it has been ours to taste and see that the Lord is gracious; if we have seen His compassionate approach, and felt His life-giving touch, and been raised above our lower, our former selves, in His divinely imparted strength—then let us show our gratitude by doing something for Him, by ministering to others in His name—not by empty professions, but by earnest effort.

"For lo! in human hearts unseen
The Healer dwelleth still,
And they who make His temple clean
The best subserve His will.

"The holiest task by heaven decreed,
An errand all divine,
The burden of our common need
To render less, is thine."*

* Whittier.

THE WIDOW'S SON

By Rev. GEO. H. MORRISON, M.A.

THE WIDOW'S SON

LUKE vii. 11-17.

LEAVING Capernaum in the cool of the early morning, our Lord made His way southwards towards Nain. It was a journey of some five-and-twenty miles, not a light task even for the strongest; but in the glorious company of Jesus I do not think that any one felt the journey long. Weariness is not always measured by distance. It has its roots in the company we keep, almost as much as in the miles we tread. There are roads that weary us out when we are solitary, and we cover them lightly with some bosom friend. Now think what the company of Jesus must have been! Think what His matchless converse must have been! Think what a wealth of meaning He must have seen in nature, as the path wound by the hill and through the valley. The feeblest traveller in the company that morning was amazed when the walls of Nain rose up before them. Ah, brethren, as it was going to Nain, so is it as we travel to eternity. It is not the seventy years that tire us out: it is the kind of company we keep. If we travel alone, if we are self-centred, if we are always thinking first of our own

feelings, depend upon it we shall be sick and sore before the walls of the four-square city flash on us. But if we walk in the company of high endeavour, of resolute craving for what is bright and noble, of lofty aim and very lowly service—in a word, if we walk in the company of Christ, then we shall run and we shall not be weary, then we shall walk and not faint. So far from being spiritless at the end, we shall come to Zion with songs upon our heads.

Our Lord, then, comes in sight of Nain, a little hillside town whose name means lovely. It was one of a score of little country towns that clung so lovingly to the green slopes of Galilee. But the other towns—we never heard of them. The most learned scholar hardly knows their names. Yet every schoolboy knows the name of Nain, and knows it just because Jesus Christ was there. What new distinction flashes on a place when once it is associated with Jesus. What a new prominence is given to a life when it is brought into relationship with Christ! We should never have heard the name of Pontius Pilate if his destiny had not brought him face to face with Jesus. We should never have heard of Peter or of John, if Christ had never walked beside the lake. But they were brought into relationship with Christ; Christ stood before them as before the gate of Nain; and that determined the tragedy of Pilate and the glory of the fishermen of Galilee. I beseech you to think, then, of the vast importance of being brought into the presence of Christ. I beseech you to banish the dream that having met with Him, life can flow on in its old channels still. For weal or woe things shall

be different. God grant it may be weal with all of us.

I want you to notice, too, that in this single glimpse which history gives us into the town of Nain —in this single glimpse there is something very homelike: there is something strangely familiar in the scene. Here, for one hour, we see an Eastern city: it is distant by thousands of miles from our own doors. Centuries of almost incredible change have passed since the moment when this curtain was rolled up. It is the child of another civilisation: there is an alien language in its streets: as far as the east is distant from the west it seems to be distant from our life to-day. Yet in the one glimpse the Bible gives of it, in the one moment when the clouds divide, there is the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin. Here is a coffin with a dead body in it: have none of us ever looked on that at home? And the dead face is that of a young man: is there no mother here who has mourned an only son? And the woman is a widow, and see! she has been weeping, and friends would give all the world to comfort her: I do not think we need to travel far to find a companion to that picture.

Ah, brethren, among all the brotherhoods, do not forget the brotherhood of sorrow. It is one of the minor helps and consolations that a man in earnest will resolutely use. We are all apt to think our lot the worst, to believe there is something peculiar in our case: to say that our cross has got more jagged edges than ever rasped on human flesh before. And we think that if others only knew our case, and could really see what we have got to bear, they would be

readier to excuse us than they are. So we take up a grudge against the world, and come to cherish a certain peevish selfishness. It is in such hours that we grow brave again by remembering the community of trial. A single glimpse into an Eastern city, and *there* are hearts companion to our own. There is not a trouble you are called to meet, but a thousand men have met it in the past. There is not a cloud that ever hides your sun, but has veiled the sunshine of countless other lives. When a man sits and lets himself be tempted, when the thought tingles into imagination, when subtle arguments crowd in upon the will, till the will yields, and the senses are triumphant: then when remorse comes, and the sense of failure, and the feeling that life has fallen like a star—in such hours of trial and strain we all think we have a secret history, and it is only in the late evening we discover that the sad secret was common to humanity. The subtlest suggestion that ever flashed on *you* has flashed on other hearts as weak as yours. The pretexts and excuses *you* keep dreaming of have sprung into countless minds since man was man. Make up your mind that your secret is no secret. It is an old story in the ear of God. *Then*, think that if men as weak as you, mastered temptation and crushed it under foot; if shoulders quite as sensitive as yours carried their cross in a victorious way; if wills unstable as you know yours to be, and hearts as timid as you have found your own—if these by the ten thousand, strong in God, have been more than conquerors in Jesus Christ, there is no reason in the world why you should fail. Remember the brotherhood of what is hard. Remember the one

glimpse we get of Nain. A fellow-feeling not only makes us kind. It is meant by God to make us strong.

I like to think, too, that in the very hour when this poor widow thought God was far away, in that very hour she was nearer God than she had ever been in all her life before. I daresay when her husband died she had been tempted to wonder if God had quite forgotten her. It was so strange that he should have been taken, and the old drunkard of Nain should still be spared. Then with a thrill of delight she thought of her son. He was hers yet, and how she loved him! The tendrils of her heart, disengaged by her husband's death, clung with a double passion to her boy. How like his father he was; she could shut her eyes, and it was her husband's voice again. And what a gallant son he was to his lone mother, and how bravely he had taken up his father's business. Ah! God had not forgotten her after all. She praised God night and morning for her son. Then her son died. I think her heart just broke. Her hope was gone. Her faith in God was shattered. It was inscrutable, utterly unexplainable. And she cried aloud, "Can there be a God in heaven?"—and the Son of God was on His way that very hour, and drawing nearer and nearer to the gate. God was never so near her as when she thought Him farthest. He was at her side when she said, "I am forgotten." She cried, "I shall never meet with God again," and Jesus met her in that very hour.

Now that reminds us of another scene. It carries us forward to the day of Calvary. This same Jesus is hanging on the cross, and His face is marred more

than any man's; and see, there is a coronation there that no sickness or no weakness can postpone, for the crown of thorns is on His head. And there is darkness from the sixth hour to the ninth, and He cries, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And now our Saviour felt forsaken of God as the widow of Nain felt when her son lay dead. But God was never nearer to our Saviour than in these moments when He felt forsaken. And the crown of glory was never closer to Him than when the crown of thorns was piercing to the quick. He seemed forsaken; the opposite was true. With the widow had it not been the same? At Calvary, as at the gate of Nain, the darkest hour was that before the dawn. Remember that when the worst comes to the worst. Believe that when things are darkest, God is nighest. There is not one of us but bitterly repents how we lost hope when everything seemed hopeless. If we had only had courage to endure a little longer, we see now how the sun would have shone again. In personal conflict and in private prayer, in depression, in despondency, in pain, in the long and weary task of training children, in the recurring hopelessness of work for Christ, do not forget that when this widow's world was darkest the Son of God was almost at her side.

And now a word on the compassion of Jesus. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her. There are two features in the compassion of Christ that stand out very clearly in this story. First, it was an individual compassion. It singled out the woman from the throng. It dealt with her as a single personality. It separated her out from all the rest.

Now I want you to remember, on the other hand, how Jesus felt compassion for the multitude. Time and again we read in the Gospel story that His sympathies were stirred by a great crowd. This, then, was one of the wonders of Christ's pity. It was so wide, yet it was so particular. It swept like a wave over the helpless many, and yet it fell like a dew upon the one. Brethren, in order to understand Christ Jesus, you have to take in His influence on history. You cannot detach that lowly Galilean from the impress He has made upon the world. You dare not limit the power of His compassion to these few months among the Highland hills. It has been powerful through all the centuries. It is powerful in the world to-day. And, tell me, is not this the wonder of it still, the width of it joined with its exquisite minuteness? It is there that the compassion of the Gospel stands unapproached and peerless in the world. There are beliefs that seem to embrace the many, and yet have no voice of comfort for the one. There are religions that come to cheer the one, yet are powerless in the presence of the crowd. The compassion of Christ at work in the world to-day is inspiring legislation for the multitude; it is moving in the new spirit of temperance; it is at the heart of every great attempt to do something for the housing of the poor. And that is the pity of Jesus for the crowd. Yet still it is an individual compassion. It is still working on the scale of one. Each soul is comforted in its separate way. Each foot is guided on its separate path. Each heart is touched with such a touch of God that we feel that no one else would understand it.

And then the other feature of our Lord's compassion is this: note how immediately it went forth in action. There was courage in it. He came and touched the bier. In the eyes of the crowd He was defiling Himself. Touching a bier was like touching a leper; it made one ceremonially unclean. But Jesus, moved with compassion, did not hesitate. There are times when it is good to follow one's own heart though we set the world of convention at defiance. He touched the bier, and the procession halted instantly. There was a note of imperious command about this stranger. And then He called to the young man, Arise, and the dead sat up and began to speak. What was behind this miracle? Compassion. Whence did it spring? From the compassion of Jesus. It was a miracle of heavenly power, but it was rooted deep in human pity. And the point I wish you to observe is this, how the pity of Jesus sprang into glorious action.

Brethren, there is no point at which we so often fail as in the right management of our emotions. If men are ruined by mismanaged passions, they are as surely deteriorated by mismanaged sentiments. We do not highly respect the emotional man, and we all smile at the sentimental woman. But the fault lies not with the emotions, but in the foolish manner that we cherish them. God did *not* give us them to make us dreamy, or to indulge us in the sweet luxuries of feeling. The heart that only feels and never acts grows utterly selfish before the sands are run. Emotion was given to be a spur to action. It was meant to give life and warmth and colour to duty. It is like the strain of military music that

kindles the soldier in the hour of battle. Used thus, it is a mighty help to noble living. And it was always used thus by Jesus Christ. I think there was something fine in a poor man I read of, who when the company were loud in pity of some sufferer, said he would sympathise to the extent of half-a-crown. There was a Christ-like note in that emotion, and I think our Lord would understand it thoroughly. No doubt the crowd that followed the widow of Nain said, "Weep not, weep not," just as Jesus did. But the compassion became Christ's, and became Christian, when He put forth His hand and touched the bier.

Then lastly, and in a word, will you observe the ease with which this miracle was wrought. In reading the story of Elijah and how *he* raised the widow's son, one point of difference must have struck us all between that miracle and this of Jesus. Elijah had to agonise with God. He had to wrestle in lonely entreaty with his Maker. He had to stretch himself three times upon the child, and every time to plead with God again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came to him again. But with Jesus Christ there was a calm authority. A touch, a word, —and the miracle was done. Elijah begged as a trusty servant might. But Jesus Christ commanded like a king. Is not that a gleam before the Resurrection of the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth? Do not be blind in the human Christ you love, to the hints and tokens that tell He is divine. I do not know what this poor widow did. The curtain drops when she gets her son again. But I seem to see her at the

feet of Jesus—when she has kissed her son, for that came first—I seem to see her at the feet of Jesus, and every Jewish prejudice is gone, and she is crying as Thomas cried a little afterwards, "My Lord and my God!"

REPEATED SIN AND INTENSIVE PUNISHMENT

Healing the Impotent Man at Bethesda

By Rev. THOMAS G. SELBY

REPEATED SIN AND INTENSIVE PUNISHMENT

Healing the Impotent Man at Bethesda

"Behold thou art made whole; sin no more lest a worse thing come unto thee."—John v. 16.

A careful reading of the narrative will show us that in the character of this unhappy man there were traits of weakness which explain his past history and threaten his unshaped future. The admonitory words with which Jesus closes His mission to the forlorn paralytic, introduce a double comparison; a comparison between an early sin and a later sin towards which the man seems to be setting his footsteps; and also a comparison between a self-induced affliction, the shadow of which has only just dispersed, and afflictions of unknown bitterness in which the lack of high religious principle is not unlikely to plunge him. For some vice of his youth, or of his early manhood, he has suffered a life-long disability. This is not a canon we must apply in judging all those who were the subjects of Christ's miraculous healing. Indeed, two years later, within a few yards of this very spot, Jesus told the disciples

that in the case of the man born blind, they were to apply no such cut-and-dried rule. This man's chronic helplessness, however, was a retributory sequence to one of the transgressions of his former life.

The moral weakness which had early borne such acrid, poisoned fruit, after persisting through a life of physical emaciation, reappears in the crisis of his healing. Never, perhaps, in the whole course of His ministry did the Divine Physician restore a man whose faith was at so low an ebb, and in whom will-power was so nearly quenched. Some one has well observed that in the cases of the Centurion and of the woman who touched Christ's garment, faith had been developed to the highest possible point. But here the pulse has almost stopped, and it seems scarcely possible to stimulate faith. The man by the pool is a heap of half-defunct faculties from which there arises nothing but a languid, desponding whine. When Jesus asks if he wills to be made whole, a querulous plaint is the only answer: "I have no man to put me into the pool." He is a man in a groove from which there is no exit, and he cannot conceive of healing through any other virtue than that of the upsurging waters by which he waits. A creature of tradition that he is, will-power, the gift of turning round the eyes of the mind, responsiveness to new methods, are gone. And yet, after his own narrow and ignoble fashion, he means well—at least for himself. He is not quite dead to religion, for when Jesus wants to speak the word of warning, He finds him in the temple.

To be found in the temple in those days perhaps

did not mean much. It was the proper thing. A man went there because it was expedient, or impelled by the habits impressed upon him in childhood, rather than from personal conviction. Certain it is, if Pontius Pilate had stretched his nets across the temple doors on some high festival, he would have gathered of every kind both good and bad. Let it be assumed, however, that this man had gone to make a formal acknowledgment of the divine favour shown in his restoration. Whoever his healer might happen to be, he at least could quiet a conscience, that had shrivelled along with his body, by giving glory to God and reserving judgment upon the Man through whom salvation had come. He was not ready to honour the Son even as he honoured the Father.

But before the thanksgiving is completed, he finds himself embarked in an unforeseen controversy with the leaders of Jewish opinion, for which he is not quite prepared. Between the porches of Bethesda and the temple gates a false step was taken. He had shown comparatively little interest in his deliverer. Who was He? The man was probably capable of making an excellent guess, for in his helplessness he would hear much of the gossip of the city; but it was well, as he judged things, not to know too much. His neutrality upon this point was an evil sign. He thought more of his healing and the improved prospect it opened, than of his healer. True, Jesus had withdrawn Himself, a multitude being in that place, but the sudden gliding away of this figure did not close up every avenue of inquiry and information. Jesus was

much talked of in the city, and if there had been sound fibre in the character of this feeble man, he would have asked the name, the history, and the mission of his benefactor. The training which took him to the temple ought to have enabled him to identify a prophet. Before he fully realises the meaning of this new beginning in his life, he is temporising with the Pharisees. He fences their assaults with the kind of cunning which is often acquired by a poor, forlorn sufferer who is soured by neglect, and in lack of healthy limbs has to make the best possible use he can of his wits. "He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk." The logic was sound and even ingenious, but a man of higher instincts and richer vitality would have started upon bolder and more clearly defined ground. The bit of promise left in the fraction of his wasted life is jeopardised by this hesitating temper. Perhaps he is in no danger of his old vices, but here you have the impotence which put him wrong forty years ago. He wavers, temporises, makes a half-hearted fight of it at the best, as in those far-off days. The old temptations are no longer possible, but there is the same inbred taint and frailty. Jesus sees and knows that the man is standing on perilous ground, and with a renewed announcement of his healing interweaves a message of warning. The healed man himself recognised the point at which danger lay, and was stirred at once to a prompt and courageous confession which gave the promise of better things. He went and told the Jews, "It was Jesus who made him whole." The confession

became his safeguard against after-failure, and was the first foundation-stone upon which a sounder character began to rise in the eleventh hour of his opportunity. The history is true to experience, for the power to rule his life in virtue and righteousness comes to many a man in the hour when he is faithful to his convictions, and makes an outward confession of Jesus Christ.

I.

These words of admonition show to us that in the Lord's judgment the beginnings of sin were inward, and it might work as much havoc in the soul as in the body.

No account is taken of the traditions and the social expediencies which from time immemorial have branded sin in its outward developments, and have ignored its poisons in the secret channels of the life. A critical Pharisee who had heard these words might have said, "Such a warning is overstrained. The poor man is all right. He has fallen into no new breach of the commandments, and he gives no sign whatever of reverting to the laxities of his early life. He is an old man, beyond reach of all fleshly temptations; and why throw the past in his teeth? Is he not fulfilling the duties binding upon a devout and reverent Jew, and could he be in a better place than the temple? Does this so-called prophet mean to imply that the atmosphere

of the sanctuary is no better than it ought to be, and that a man may find his way to the house of death from the holy courts trodden by priests and Levites?"

The healed man certainly needed this admonition, for Jesus was not accustomed to speak irrelevant and unseasonable words, and this prophet from Nazareth saw further into the human heart than the shrewdest Pharisee. The soul leads the body, and this poor weakling had got into a perplexing labyrinth, and the path upon which he had entered might land him back at his old standpoint, whether he were susceptible to old temptations or not. The sin which had been visited and bitterly avenged for more than a generation was symptomatic of inward derangement, and the old dry-rot was still present in the soul of the healed man.

Three things seem to indicate that there had been no inward adjustment and re-invigoration corresponding to the recovery which had come to his body.

1. *The man lacked gratitude.*

His disposition removes whatever surprise we may have felt at the fact that every friend had failed him, and he had no one to put him into the pool. If the man thought so little of his miraculous healer as to neglect asking His name, what kind of thanks would he have presented to a neighbour who might have given him a lift into the pool and left the uprising virtue to do its own work? He would have been too lazy and self-absorbed to make more than the most formal acknowledgment. Perhaps he had been found out for years. He was not the kind of

man from whom very much gratitude could be expected.

2. *His ignorance is the mark of a self-centred habit of mind, and of a depraved moral tone.*

He had little or no interest in any one besides himself. A just sense of obligation to his healer would have compelled him to pick up some little information before leaving the porch in which he had experienced such unhoped-for fortune. The man had, for the time being, that ethical blindness which is incapable of recognising a benefactor. Those who profit by the great historic charities generally make it a point of honour to know something about the founders. We trace with fond admiration the early life and career of the painter who is a new eye to us and makes us see things we have never before seen in nature. We should be ashamed to remain in ignorance of the man who has recreated the past in the pages of his history, or given to us a new sense of the delights of literature. The reader of Shakespeare likes to follow the too scanty outlines of his life, to see his birthplace and visit his haunts: and a bit of new information about the great dramatist would be worth a thousand pounds any day. We wish to know our benefactors, and should despise ourselves if destitute of such feelings. Thousands of people in Jerusalem knew a great deal more about Jesus than the healed man by the pool, and for certain reasons of his own, perhaps, he did not set himself to get information.

3. *His unwillingness to confess Jesus Christ implied an ugly void of all the better qualities of human nature.*

He was going to spend his recovered life upon himself, and did not hold himself under any obligation to side with the cause of his healer. When Jesus warned him, he knew at once that this selfish timidity was the first vice he had to pluck up by the roots. Sin always begins deep down under the surface of the life, and it was making a new incursion into this poor man's soul.

The admonition which supplemented this miracle is at one with the Master's teaching to all His disciples, whatever the kind of good they had received at His hands. Devotion to Himself and His cause must be expressed on the very threshold of discipleship in unfaltering confession, and by a love which surpasses the instinctive attachment we feel to our earthly benefactors and friends. Otherwise, there can be no true obedience to those high moralities of His kingdom which sum up and transcend all other moralities. The lack of such devotion is a peril to all who are awake to the moral failures of the past, and who in some moment of providential opportunity have found in Jesus the hope of redemption. Let us beware of any presumed acceptance of the benefits of Christ's work, which does not issue in fervent gratitude, enlarged knowledge, and the open avowal of our Benefactor, for recipiency unattended by such tempers is illusory and impermanent. If we appreciate the debt under which we are placed to the compassionate ministry of Jesus Christ, we shall be thankful. And if we are thankful, we shall be so interested in our Benefactor that we shall seek to learn all that is possible about Him, and shall be watching for every opportunity of turning our guesses into knowledge

and solid experience. His form may have been veiled to us; He may have presented Himself as a stranger, and the deliverance from the curse of the past which has come to us may be due to a word spoken in His name, rather than to any sensible touch of His hand. But love will insist upon knowing more, and, if possible, establishing the conditions of communion. And in the case of every right-minded man, knowledge will be followed by firm confession; confession like that of the healed man in the presence of Christ's very adversaries. It is the note of a mean and a reprobate soul, to get secret help and carry it away in artful silence. Such thankless weaklings cannot expect continued help and life-long salvation. The absence of these fundamental conditions of the new life, gratitude, knowledge eager to grow, and fearless confession, justifies our Lord and Judge in presuming that we are on the verge of reiterated transgression and bitterer shame. If there be in us no heart for the further search after Jesus Christ, and no strong purpose to make Him known to others, our state is one of incipient sin, and is ominous of coming failure. A correct outward life can only be ensured by right, inward dispositions. The Searcher of hearts sometimes sees the signs of hideous and woeful lapse under the forms of decorum and conventional piety.

It is said that when one of the English Sanitary Reformers was presented to the late Emperor of the French, that monarch asked him, "What do you think of Paris?" And the reply given was "Fair above; foul below. Sire, it was said of the Emperor Augustus that He found Rome a city of brick, and

left it a city of marble. If you will make Paris as sweet below as it is fair above, you will earn for yourself a greater reputation than that of Augustus." The great Healer sought not only to reconstruct this man's outward life, but to send streams of purer thought and nobler feeling through all its hidden foundations. Jesus never forgets those secret currents of vitality, which must be sweetened before human character can become wholesome and benign. He does not begin its reconstruction from the top downwards. Its thoughts and aims, its tempers and affections, must be cleansed and purified. The hand that accepts a selfish salvation, the stolid heart that seeks escape from privation and nothing more, the soul that shirks its debt of gratitude, the white, trembling lips which tell of a craven reluctance to confess—all these things are foul, however fair the structure which meets the common eye. Channels for the new tides of moral influence must be opened amidst the foundation courses of the rehabilitated life.

II.

The words addressed to the healed man in the temple show that the guilt of sin culminates with its repetition.

This is not the view current in the world. Sin, it is sometimes assumed, passes into the category of a disease when it has become an ineradicable habit, and the transgressor is looked upon as a disagreeable machine, of which responsibility can scarcely be pre-

dicated. Whilst there are forms of disease at work in human society, which take on the shapes of deadly sin, yet this is a misleading and mischievous principle to apply where there was responsibility at the beginning, and the responsibility has been re-established again, as in the ministry of the Lord Jesus to this healed man. Whilst sin may involve the complete loss of self-mastery, yet the power of self-mastery is again and again given back to us. But with new opportunity the sin that tempts the man reappears with increased virulence, and its perpetration obviously assumes a deeper shade of guilt. Evil, cast out for a time from the soul, returns helped by demoniac forces to its old malign tyranny in the lost citadel.

A period of culminating moral discipline had just closed in the life of this man.

By early transgressions he had made himself for thirty-eight years a useless and unhappy cripple, cut off from the pleasures and activities of human society. Alas! if he had failed to profit by his hot ordeal, for there was not much more to be learned in the school of earthly suffering. He knew almost as much as could be taught him. Providence could scarcely afflict him more sternly without making his pains the interminable pains of the lost. It had no other lashes of earthly distress to lay upon him. Poor, lonely, bed-ridden, hopeless not only of natural recovery but of the superhuman cure that came to the favoured few! If such a victim had not already learned the judicial lessons of his history it would be difficult to say into what new school he could be put. We should long ago have pronounced him intractable.

No more cups of earthly bitterness were in reserve for him. What new power of tribulation could awaken this moral paralytic to consciousness? The earnestness of our Lord's warning suits the last fierce stage of earthly discipline.

Some of us, perhaps, are in danger of reaching the end of the appointed chastisements by which God strives to arouse and save us into a new life. We are told that certain infusoria which die with sudden changes of temperature may be kept alive under extremes of heat and cold, if they are only habituated to the change by slow degrees. Low forms of life are often found in hot mineral springs. And our sins have an equal tenacity. We harden ourselves step by step against every form of providential judgment, till God can scarcely touch us with his admonitory pains. We can never exhaust His love, for this endures for ever. But we may exhaust His remedial chastisements, which is quite as terrible. With what rod has He not smitten us? Solitude, humiliation, sickness, the mockery of our hopes and ambitions, the shadows of death falling in quick succession upon our hearthstone? We are becoming acclimatised to pain. Sin defies the purifying fires which ought to destroy it. Another term of blended judgment and mercy leaves us at the old standpoint. God has few shafts left in the armoury of earthly pain to shoot at us. The discipline of the past reaches its culmination. Sin has been strengthened by all the admonitory processes through which it has persisted. Let us beware of making the remnant of our life as weak through frailty, and as unholy through self-indulgence, as its preceding acts. The last chapter may have come in

our discipline, and the last page may be opened before us.

Reiterated sin tends to exhaust the known and appointed resources of divine grace meted out to men upon earth.

Upon this paralysed man a miracle of culminating virtue had been wrought. By a new creating word he had been lifted from the living death in which he had been stretched for a generation. Whilst lying there babes had grown into maturity, and a new generation had begun to turn the crest of the hill. And now he is started like a young athlete in the race of life once more. A resurrection could add little to the splendour of this miracle. In fact, this was a resurrection in which the rigid, decrepit subject of it, with just a faint spark of consciousness in his brain, watched the marvellous reanimation of his own skeleton. He felt the tide of a new life rise over the last ebbing pulse of the old. Such a miracle admitted of no further climax. If the healed man could resist the influence of this inimitable sign he was surely beyond all spiritual quickening. Unless conscience now rose up into vigilance there could be no possible help for him, and he must pass into darkness and shame. Divine grace had reached the last term of its earthly possibilities.

And have not some of us perhaps arrived at a corresponding stage in our spiritual life-history? Jesus proclaims forgiveness to us through the cross, and His grace reaches its meridian. The Lord of mercy and power shows us as much of Himself as we can hope to see here upon earth. We certainly do not need to know more for our complete salvation.

The Son of God comes near, and with His authoritative voice contradicts the voice of nature and its guilty forebodings. He assures us of a forgiveness vast and free, of infinite healing for our inward maladies. In His presence our disablements cease, for the strength of His own life throbs within us, and the past habits that held us flesh-bound lose their power to detain. And He is near once more to lift us into favour and to turn the wrong currents in our lives. Grace is mounting to its culminating height. Let us take heed that we receive not the mercy of God in vain. If our sin defies such resources, what right or reason have we to speak of a larger hope? The redemption which now comes nigh unto us was conceived in the dim profound of Infinite love, and if we indurate ourselves against its supreme charities it is difficult to see what God Himself can do for us. Does not the reiterated sin which follows this final disclosure of divine grace crucify the Son of God afresh? and such a black tragedy can be followed by no sunrise. God has already given His best, and given it to us, and there can be nothing beyond the climax. "Thou art made whole; sin no more lest a worse thing come unto thee."

It is said that some diseases prove fatal when they seize a second or a third time upon the system. And may it not be so with some of the sins against which the voice of the Master is warning us? There are delinquencies in the past above which we have risen for a space: an indifference, perhaps, to fine business scruples in which we once justified ourselves, fits of unreasonable anger that almost unhinged us, allurements to excess and sensuality from which we after-

wards felt a self-respecting recoil. The divine forgiveness, unwearied and inimitable, has brought us health and salvation. Let us take heed lest old sins creep back and leave their last indelible trail upon the life. The recrudescence of past sin may be fatal to our spiritual hopes. We have fallen and risen again; is it once or twice or thrice? Down into the sunless depths, and back again into light and blessedness. And yet another plunge into the cold, dark abyss, the power of resisting passion and the desire for virtue almost gone, and then a new glimpse of light and redemption. With failing pulse and dejected spirit whelmed once more into the vortex of sin and shame; and yet another faint glimpse of the merciful face of God. Let us beware of the further fall. Moral buoyancy is not quite gone, and the hopeless depths have not become our last prison-house. The great Healer is still within reach and hearing, and greets us once more in the temple. Listen to the admonition joined to His plenary forgiveness: "Thou art made whole; sin no more lest a worse thing come unto thee."

III.

Our Lord's words remind us of the intensive punishment awaiting repeated sin: "Lest a worse thing come unto thee."

A solemn comparison is suggested between what the man has suffered in this life, and what, if deaf to warning, he may have to suffer in the life to come;

for the words obviously look beyond all present horizons. The fraction of life left to the healed man would scarcely give space for the accelerated pain referred to. The unseen penalties of transgression are more grievous than the most dismal forms of bodily suffering. And how much does this imply? The temporal disability was surely enough to affright the imagination. It was no light burden that had come to this man, a burden the retrospect of which must have been saddening indeed. His powers had been sapped in the heyday of his strength. Shut out from the best tasks of life, denied the solace of its genial relationships, face to face with daily suffering, the scenes of a lazar house always present to the eye, what more hideous destiny could befall a misguided and unhappy mortal? And yet the words of Jesus convey the haunting thought that for the man who neglects the crises of grace in his life, the unknown retributions are more terrible than any of which he has hitherto had experience. Perhaps we do not always know the worst that may be said of the living death which is the wages of sin here. The woe it works is veiled from us. It is hidden by closed doors, thickly curtained windows, and sacred reservations put round mourning and shame-stricken households. It buries itself in hospitals, poorhouses, asylums; and an inviolable etiquette imposes silence. That it should be so is well for our comfort, and the world must not be made unduly morbid. The places of retribution on earth and beneath the earth are sealed-up realms. Final punishment for one who persists in sin and fritters away his opportunities is sharper than the sharpest penalties of time. A worse thing than

long years of weary, miserable, aborted life threatens the man who resists the grace which is visiting him. Spent nerve, decadent brain, aching limb, loneliness and neglect, the repugnance of bystanders, are retributions that do not traverse all the soul's susceptibilities to pain. These are the primitive elements out of which the complex, cumulative penalties of the hereafter will be built up, if we reject the Deliverer, and despise His admonitions.

This exhortation is addressed to those who have come face to face with Jesus, and made proof in some degree of His grace and quickening power. In our secret thought, we too often reserve the divine threatenings for those who live careless and disobedient lives, and do not meet Christ in the temple, or at the place of healing. But such as receive the grace of God, it may be in vain, need this message, for they challenge a more withering condemnation than befalls the rest. Sins of the spirit lead to sins of the flesh, and both will be rigorously judged. The dregs of the divine wrath are reserved for ungrateful and treacherous backsliding. For our quickening, and for our comfort, let us remember that the warning against repeated sin and the declaration of forgiveness are conjoined. The admonitory voice will speak in vain, unless it at the same time inspire us with hope. We must be made to feel that there is something worth taking care for, that we have indeed a gift and a blessing to keep.

The man who finds here no needful or relevant message is perhaps the man who is nearest the centre of danger. It is said that when the great volcanic eruption occurred in the Straits of Sunda, detona-

tions which were heard two, and even three, thousand miles away, were not perceived by the people who lived at the foot of the mountain. The explanation of that curious fact given by scientific students is that the air was filled with volcanic dust, which, like a thick curtain, cut off all the sound waves. Around the pathway of the transgressor there is sometimes an atmosphere in which every spiritual voice is deadened into dumbness. The sphere in which you live and move is charged with the cares and secular interests of life, perhaps permeated through and through with follies and dissipations which separate between the inward ear and the ominous thunder-notes which might prove your salvation. You stand at the focus of danger. Others hear the warning tones. The angels who wait in their thousands before this new Sinai may listen with awe. And yet you are stone-deaf and unheeding. "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and in ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

The voice still speaks in the temple, and its tones are full with both warning and mercy. Saved from pain, helplessness, and shame, by a miracle of pity, see to it that you do not put your salvation into needless jeopardy. He who heals our impurities magnifies His word no less by making it mighty to keep from sin. The second command, as well as the first, becomes a fulfilled promise as we are in the act of obeying it. Let there be no temporising, no submission to the new temper of impotence which seeks to insinuate itself afresh into the life. If the Deliverer has come to you, give Him the love for

which He waits, and let your neighbours know, even if they are bitter and unfriendly, the name of Him who has become the health of your countenance and your God. "The man went away and told the Jews it was Jesus who had made him whole."

THE MIRACULOUS FEEDING OF FIVE THOUSAND

By Rev. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

THE MIRACULOUS FEEDING OF FIVE THOUSAND

"And he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and blessed and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude; and they did all eat and were filled; and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full."—MATTHEW xiv. 19, 20.

OUR Lord did not come to work miracles of this kind. If He had gone about every day multiplying loaves, supplying food gratuitously, converting stones into bread, and creating wealth for everybody, He would have had a triumphal and popular march through life; and there would have been no crucifixion scene at the end. And there would also have been no Saviour of the world. He did not come to fill hungry mouths, and distribute freely the material goods of life, and change every waste place into a fruit-bearing garden. He had a far higher purpose than that. He knew that if He could only save men from their sins, the other things would gradually come right; and that if He could fill the world with truth and justice and love, there would be little want and poverty left, and no fierce struggle for existence. And yet four times He wrought a miracle to provide hungry people with a meal—twice for the disciples

on the Sea of Galilee, and twice for the multitude in the desert. He fed them, because He had compassion on them. He knew what it was to be hungry Himself, and he who has felt those pinchings will never let another feel them, if he can prevent it. And He gave that meal to the multitude, to teach His followers through all ages that, unless they cared for men's bodily wants, they would never touch the moral and spiritual in them. It is of no use trying to teach starving people the higher truths. Hunger drives out every other desire, and deadens for the time being every other faculty. The Gospel of eternal life sounds no better than a mockery in the ears of those who are having a sordid, brutal, terrible fight to keep this present life going. Relieve their bodily pains and fierce necessities, and then preach your sermon. That was what the Saviour meant by this miracle, and by the word of command spoken to the disciples: "Give ye them to eat."

The story is all exquisitely beautiful, and in every point and detail suggestive of truths which have nothing to do with loaves and fishes—truths which belong to the spiritual realm and the laws of Christ's kingdom.

I.

First, the Lord gave His disciples a lesson in self-sacrifice.

For we cannot help thinking that they had ordered, and probably purchased, these loaves and fishes for their own evening meal, and they were not very

eager to part with them in that indiscriminate charity. They expostulated before they consented. It was like giving up a bit of their dear selves. Why did the Master ask them for the sacrifice? He could just as easily have dispensed with that foundation for His miracle. It would have required no more power to create bread out of stones, or out of nothing at all. It must have been to make them understand that self-denial is the first condition of spiritual power—that we cannot help men in a saving way unless we give them a bit of ourselves; and that, if we would do the work of Christ, there must always be the love which forgets its own need in pity of others. There must always be something of the spirit of the Cross. As Christ saved us by giving us His very flesh to eat, so His Church must save men by losing itself in their service.

II.

Secondly, our Lord taught the disciples here to regard themselves as indispensable co-workers with Him.

He linked and wedded them with Himself in this miraculous work. The supernatural power was all His own, but the glory of it was shared with them. It was as their hands gave the bread out that the magical increase took place. It was through their ministry that the blessing was conferred. Of course He could have done without their help, just as God could do His work without our help, if His wisdom

so ordained. But He loves us too well to dispense with us. He promotes His children by making them His fellow-labourers. Christ was always instilling into these men's minds the thought that He needed them—that His divinity begged of their humanity to help Him. If it was true that without Him they could do nothing, it was no less true that He depended on them for the carrying forward of His work. He was always trying to make them believe in themselves, and in the power with which He had entrusted them, just as He is always saying to us now: despise not the gift that is in thee; thou and thy work are needed, and through thee I can still magnify Myself and give gifts to men. We blunder often; we spoil the work; we fall asleep over it. A less patient master would take it angrily out of our hands, and do it Himself; but the great Master is never impatient, and however ill we serve, He still asks for our service, and even tells us that He cannot do without it. He is always linking us with Himself in His great ministry of mercy and salvation. We are only earthen vessels; yet the earthen vessel may be made glorious by holding and conveying the divine treasure.

III.

Thirdly, there was a sublime lesson of faith taught in the command: "Give ye them to eat."

How could they do it? It was absurd and impossible. Two hundred pennyworth of bread

would not suffice for that multitude. Doubt held their feet. A sceptical wonder in their eyes asked what does He mean? There was just a touch of derision on their lips as they said, whence shall we, with our empty purse, buy food for all this crowd? And the Lord rebuked their unbelief in a way that they would never forget. He gave them to understand that whatever He commissioned them to do, He would empower them to do. "Give ye them to eat," He said, and trembling unbelief answered, "We have nothing to give." "Nevertheless, give them what ye have;" and lo, obedience brought omnipotence to their help. Ever as they gave, they were still able to give the more. Out of their very penury they were made rich, and out of their weakness strong. For where faith is there is divine power at the back of it, and the thing which is impossible with men becomes possible with God. And the whole secret of a brave, and noble, and victorious life, is told there. Man's weakness of itself can do no great and good thing; but man's weakness, waiting on God, and obeying and believing, can do well-nigh anything. And this is ever Christ's word to us when we draw back and hesitate—when we murmur that this is too difficult to do, and that too hard to bear, and the work too heavy to undertake, and the sea too deep to cross, and the height too steep to climb. He just tells us again the story of those twelve reluctant men, and how the bread grew in their hands when they took Him at His word, and ventured. It would be well with us if we could recall and apply every day of our lives that particular lesson of the story. And yet these are only side lights and secondary suggestions.

IV.

The fourth and principal thought in the miracle is the figure which it presents of the Lord Himself and His teaching.

As the bread was multiplied, and made sufficient for an uncounted multitude, so He Himself is inexhaustible; and the truths which He spoke retain all their fulness, and even increase in satisfying, nourishing power as they are given out to men. It is amazing to think how comparatively few were the words of Jesus; how small a space in print is filled by these precious sayings of His. Measure the quantity and bulk of them against the volumes which have come from some of the great thinkers of the world—Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Shakespeare, Carlyle, and Ruskin — and they are small, almost insignificant. One play of Shakespeare contains as many words as all Christ's recorded words. You could read them all hurriedly in about two hours. It would be no prodigious feat of memory to be able to repeat them all. They were no larger in weight and measure than the five loaves and two small fishes. And a doubting enquirer might have asked: What are these among so many? What are these to feed the world's spiritual hunger through all ages? Yet these were put into the disciples' hands to distribute to the world, and the distribution has been going on ever since, and there are still no signs of

exhaustion and giving out. The words become even more savingly powerful as the centuries roll on, because the wisdom and beauty and divinity of them are better understood. They gather momentum as they run. They increase in youthfulness as time ages them. They are a force which loses nothing by wear and waste and friction. They are a river which grows all the deeper and fuller the more its waters are spread. They meet the most earnest questions of every age ; they respond to the most anxious quest of every century. The story of divine love which He told is everlastingly new. His call to the weary and heavy laden still descends like sweet morning dew on souls over-weighted with life's cares. His words to the sin-sick and penitent still restore and revive. His promises are still laden with comfort and hope to the mourner and the heart-broken. There is nothing gone from His words, and from the life they bring. There is nothing added to them, for they need no addition. They are inexhaustible, and the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. For nineteen hundred years that miracle of the loaves has been repeating itself in the living bread which came from His lips : " The words which I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

And what is more, Jesus gives Himself to the world for evermore, just as He gave His word, and just as He gave those loaves to the multitude. He lives again and again and again inexhaustibly in the lives of those who love Him. He reproduces Himself, and creates Himself afresh in millions of hearts which are united to Him. He imparts His own thoughts, spirit, temper, and Cross power, to all who

truly commune with Him, and draw from Him. There is no limit to this giving of Himself. His love is always kindling love. His pity is always producing pity. His sacrifice is always calling out sacrificial lives. His Cross is always supplying subduing and sanctifying grace. His divine sonship is always giving men power to become sons of God. We do not see Him. The hand which feeds us is hidden. The world often thinks Him dead, because He has been silent and invisible for two millenniums. Yet His moral and spiritual recreative and attractive power in the world is greater than ever. Because He lives, we live, and countless thousands live, in the only true, deep sense of that word. Because He lives, we rise above the carnal life to the life that partakes of the divine. There is always the same converting power in Him, and the same quickening and uplifting power, and the same power of inflaming cold hearts with passion and devotion, and the same power of making sin hateful and goodness lovely in men's eyes, and the same power of inspiring them to great and noble effort, and the same power of lifting them above their burdens, griefs, and fears, into a world of blessed light and triumphant hope. Everywhere His presence is life-giving, everywhere beautiful qualities and thoughts spring up as He passes by and His feet touch the soil. In thousands of young lives He is the source of noblest ambition and holy endeavour; in thousands of mature and aged lives He is the giver of enduring strength and patience, and the antidote of weariness and pain.

And still it goes on for ever, and will go on—the great miracle, the great outflow, the great distribu-

tion, of which that scene in the desert was but a feeble prophetic type, which makes us say thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift, and emboldens us to sing :

"What thy need He can supply it,
Longing He can grant.
In Him is exhaustless fulness
For each want."

WALKING ON THE SEA

By Rev. Principal D. ROWLANDS, B.A.

WALKING ON THE SEA

"But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid."—MATTHEW xiv. 24-27.

OUR Lord was now at the height of His popularity. His fame as a prophet filled the land. Increasing thousands followed Him wherever He went, who were eager to hear His words and to witness His power. The latest marvel—the feeding of the five thousand—had increased their excitement; for it appealed to that insatiable cupidity which in all ages has been the dominant characteristic of the race to which they belonged. All this interfered with His movements, and threatened in no small degree to thwart His plans. We are not surprised, therefore, that He should constrain His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. When He had done this, He retired, according to His custom, into a neighbouring mountain to pray. He wished to be alone; He sought the shelter of the friendly shades of night; far up the solitary heights He

escaped from the attention of the vulgar crowds which dogged His footsteps, and found congenial employment in communing with His Father. To a pure soul like His, weary of the shams, the strifes, the tumults of everyday life, to come into contact with the Eternal, in the stillness of the midnight hour, must have been a luxury of unspeakable preciousness. During the day He had to encounter the murmurs of the hypocritical Pharisee, the objections of the haughty scribe, the sneers of the shallow worldling; but now there is a cessation of hostilities; the Pharisee, the scribe, the worldling are at rest; and He enjoys the soothing influence of the silent stars, the soughing winds, and the mighty rocks. Here He could prepare Himself for the conflicts of the morrow. And what did that preparation consist in? *Prayer.* It was this that gave Him the strength necessary to overcome the difficulties lying in His way. Does not this fact suggest a very obvious lesson? Does it not explain much of our own weakness? Why are we so easily cast down? Is it not because we do not systematically retire from the world to converse with God? Depend upon it, the man who is instant in prayer is always a hero in life's battle. Your cowards are the men who are constantly baffled through relying upon their own impotence.

But while our Lord was praying in the mountain, His disciples were in imminent danger of their lives upon the sea. A fearful storm had arisen, one of those violent, sudden, rushing squalls peculiar to the district, and it lashed the angry sea into a state of implacable fury. The little ship that had a few hours

before sailed so gallantly out of port, was now so driven by the wind, and tossed by the waves, that it seemed on the point of being swallowed up by the deep. How the disciples trembled! The last ray of hope was all but extinguished. The great misfortune was that the Master was not with them. Had He been there, even though asleep, they might have easily roused Him, and brought Him to their rescue. But, alas! He was far away. Death stared them in the face, and there was none to help. No wonder, then, that they should give way to despair. But had the Master really forgotten them? By no means. Though absent in body, He was present in spirit. Distance made no difference whatever to Him. Though thick darkness veiled the earth, He could see their toils and their struggles. Though the elements roared aloud, He could hear their cries for deliverance. And, contrary to their expectations, He appeared at once on the scene, and afforded them effectual relief.

Life, my friends, may be very aptly compared to a voyage. At our birth we enter upon the sea, and at our death we reach the port for which we are bound. That port must be either heaven or hell, ineffable light or outer darkness, eternal joy or lasting woe. Which? The answer must lie with ourselves. The port we shall eventually reach must be determined by the course in which we steer our vessel. Moreover, life is sometimes calm, and sometimes stormy—sometimes like the sea reposing under the soft smiles of a summer morn, and sometimes like the sea ruffled and disturbed by the restless gales of a winter night.

Let us observe—

I.

That there are seasons in which life resembles a stormy sea.

I speak of life in general, and not of life as it develops itself in the experience of any particular class of men.

1. *There are storms for all, believers and unbelievers alike.*

You must not imagine that by believing the Gospel you will escape the storms of life, or you will be grievously disappointed. You may then, possibly, be exposed to fiercer blasts than before. Troubles hitherto unknown may now present themselves. Nor can you expect that by refusing to believe the Gospel you will escape the storms of life. In that case you only linger in the regions whence every storm proceeds. Some through their noble-mindedness and lofty aims suffer from the attacks of ignoble souls, the opposition of corrupt society, the scorn of a perverse world. Others through abandoning themselves to the sway of evil desires rush headlong to misery, ruin, and death. It matters not what your position in life may be—whether you be rich or poor, famous or obscure—the storms of life, with more or less violence, will certainly disturb your course. And the only way to be happy in the midst of them is to endure them bravely, trusting in the mercy and goodness of God. He who puts his

confidence in the Most High can no more be injured by the trials of earth, than the stately mountain can be overthrown by the furious elements that beat against its brow.

2. *You sometimes get into storms when on the path of duty.*

The disciples on this occasion had been commanded to take this voyage; they were doing what was unquestionably their duty; they were simply following the instructions of the Master. It is very probable, therefore, that they were astounded at the result. When Jonah was commissioned to go to Nineveh to declare the wrath of God against the wickedness of the city, we are told that he preferred going to Tarshish, thus ignoring the command of Jehovah. And what was the consequence? There was a great storm at sea, and the ship in which he had embarked was well-nigh lost. But surely he had no reason to complain; he had no right to be astonished; for he had brought himself into difficulties simply through doing wrong. It was very different in the case before us. These men were blameless; nay, more, they were praiseworthy, for they were endeavouring to the utmost of their power to carry out the will of their Lord. And yet they were for this very reason brought to death's door. I should not wonder a bit if their faith began to forsake them. But they knew not yet what a glorious deliverance was prepared for them—knew not that this bitter trial would end in strengthening their faith in God.

We are sometimes told, "Do what is right, and you will not suffer." That has a very plausible

sound; but then it is not true, for it very frequently happens otherwise. Why was Joseph cast into prison in Egypt? Was it not because he chose to keep a pure conscience rather than accede to the wicked desires of his mistress? Why were the martyrs put to death? Was it not because their loyalty to truth would not allow them to renounce their principles? Let us never shut our eyes to the fact, that the way of duty is sometimes the way of the cross. This, however, ought not to perplex us. There is a God who will yet judge the earth. There is a day coming when all wrongs shall be redressed, when eternal righteousness will assert its sway; and in the cloudless light of that day we shall doubtless be able to perceive how our darkest sorrows were in reality blessings in disguise.

3. *Let us now consider some of the sources whence the storms which disturb the lives of godly men arise.*

(1) *Worldly embarrassments.*

Such embarrassments are oftentimes the result of culpable negligence. Many a man neglects his business and gradually drifts to bankruptcy; many a man enters on a mad speculation, and finds himself ruined in a single day; many a man sets at nought the laws of his being, and is utterly crushed as a necessary consequence. And it is not uncommon to hear such men complain of the capriciousness of fate, and accuse Providence of blind partiality. On the other hand, embarrassments will sometimes arise out of circumstances over which you have no control. You may devote all your energies to your business;

you may observe with all diligence the laws of success; and yet be baffled at every point, and fail in every effort. Such a lot is very hard to bear. The heart is then enshrouded in an impenetrable cloud of darkness.

(2) *Divine visitations.*

This frail body of ours is subject to a thousand ills. Suffering in its various forms abounds on every hand. And when one is laid for weeks on a bed of sickness, longing the night for the morning and the morning for the night, and in the extremity of his anguish ready to welcome death itself, then indeed does he experience the mysterious bitterness of existence. Moreover, this is emphatically a world of bereavements. You know not the moment the friend you hold dearest may be taken from you. Who is there that has not been in the house of mourning? Nay, who is there that has not stood by the grave, to see it close upon the remains of a beloved being, whom he would have given the whole world to retain? Often and often does death cross our path, leaving each time a dark track behind it, which makes life a very different thing from what it was before.

(3) *Persecutions for righteousness' sake.*

I am not going to speak of the apostolic age, when Jewish prejudice was exceeding mad against the Christian faith. I am not going to speak of the days of Romish ascendancy, when Protestants were consigned to the flames. Thanks be to God, those times are past. We enjoy an amount of religious liberty that has no precedent in the history of the world. Still we speak of persecutions; and when

we do so we use no figures of speech, we describe no phantoms; but we point to painful realities. Let a man determine to pursue an independent course, to do the right regardless of public opinion, to declare the truth, though it be against the world; and in nine cases out of ten he will be persecuted, his motives will be questioned, his reputation will be blackened, and his neighbours will treat him with contempt. Our Lord said, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!" And why? Just because it is a proof that your life is a false one. "For so," said He, "did their fathers unto the false prophets." On the other hand He said, "Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your names as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in Heaven." And why? Just because it is a proof that your life is a true one. "For in like manner," said He, "did their fathers unto the prophets."

II.

That Christ frequently visits His disciples in the storm.

It is this that makes their condition amidst the storms of life so much better than that of other men. All have their trials, godly and ungodly alike; but the godly alone are favoured with the supporting presence of the Saviour. Mark—

1. *When Christ appears, His people are sometimes more dismayed at first than encouraged.*

So it happened on this occasion. "And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear." Looking wildly about them, they could discern in the distance the form of a man, walking on the foaming crests of the waves. What could it be? A man? No, impossible; for how could a man tread upon the waters? Being, like most seafaring men, of a superstitious turn of mind, they came to the conclusion that it must be a ghost—an apparition—a grim visitor from the other world. And as this idea forced itself upon them, they could not refrain from crying out with terror. Thus, my friends, God's people are sometimes perplexed at the manner in which He comes to deliver them. "All these things are against me," said the patriarch Jacob, in the anguish of his soul. But was he right? By no means. The things of which he so bitterly complained, were overruled by Divine Providence for the saving of his house from death. Had "these things," dark, perplexing, unwelcome, as they were—had "these things" never happened, then he and his children must have fallen victims to the famine, and his race must have been blotted out from the face of the earth.

2. *When Christ appears, He never fails to make Himself known.*

"But straightway Jesus spake to them, saying, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid." The reassuring accents of His familiar voice acted like a charm upon them, the whole truth flashed in a moment upon their minds, the apparition which they so much

dreaded was no other than their Lord Himself, whom, above all others, they longed to see. We are reminded here of our Lord's appearance to Mary Magdalene, when with a heavy heart and trembling steps she visited His grave. She knew Him not at first; she supposed Him to be the gardener; and had grave suspicions that it was he that had taken the body away. But when He called her by name, "Mary," she discovered at once that it was her risen Lord. We are reminded also of the two disciples who journeyed to Emmaus, conversing about the sorrowful events of the preceding days, which had completely blighted their fondest hopes. Our Lord joined them on their way, entered into their conversation, and explained the predictions of Scripture concerning Himself. But they knew Him not; they thought He was a stranger, and invited Him as such to partake of their evening meal. At last when He broke the bread in His accustomed manner, their eyes were opened, and they recognised in Him their crucified Lord.

We should never be rash in judging appearances. Let us be patient. What we suppose to be a malignant spirit may be the Saviour Himself. Let us only wait, and presently He will reveal Himself in all the fulness of His love. "It is I; be not afraid." It was enough. To know that it was the Master, at once dispelled their fears. So when we are assured that Christ is in the dark cloud—the bitter sorrow—the heavy loss—let us welcome it as our chief joy.

3. *When Christ appears, He brings effectual aid.*

No sooner had He set foot on the ship than He looked the storm in the face, and with an authority

which the angry billows dared not question, said, "Peace, be still!" Immediately there was a great calm; not only a calm, but a *great calm.* The clear, placid waters of the resting sea reflected the sparkling stars of the deep blue firmament above, as if no wayward blast had ever disturbed their silent repose. What a grand change!—from tumult to stillness, from danger to safety, from utter despair to gladness and joy! Surely no other friend could have done so much for the disciples as their Lord did on this occasion. Ah! my friends, the lesson which this incident is designed to teach is always true; as true now as it was nineteen centuries ago: that no earthly friend can help us as effectually as our Lord can. Others may express sympathy with us in our trials, may weep with us in our sorrows,—and we bless God for the kindness which abounds on every hand, and the help we receive from loving Christian friends,—but after all how inadequate the most potent human aid in the trying circumstances we have sometimes to pass through! There are depths of grief into which our dearest friends cannot follow us; there are extremes of anguish which those who are nearest to us cannot understand; there are times when we feel ourselves tossed about on the troubled ocean of life *alone*, with no one near that can give us a helping hand, left to perish amidst the howling tempests that beat upon our shattered bark. But Christ can follow us there; He can lift up His voice higher than the roaring waves; He can bring rest, and peace, and joy to our storm-tossed souls. What a comforting thought!—"He will never leave us nor forsake us;" when we "pass through the waters" He is with us; when we

are ready to faint under the burdens of life, His everlasting arms are underneath to support us.

In conclusion we may add that the world benefits by the presence of good men. No doubt there were other vessels out on the sea of Galilee during that stormy night. They also were driven hither and thither by the cruel tempest that swept over the surface of the waters. They also struggled and toiled and braved the furious winds to the best of their power; but it is more than probable that they would have been overwhelmed, had they been left in their perilous position much longer. But because of the precious craft which contained the disciples, the sea was calmed and they escaped their doom. It is ever the same. We know not what sufferings this world of ours is spared, or what blessings it enjoys, simply because there are those whom the Lord loves dwelling in it. We are told that even Sodom would have been saved had there been ten righteous men within it. How many times our own land has been delivered from impending ruin for the sake of God's saints, God Himself only knows. "Ye are the light of the world; ye are the salt of the earth," said our Lord; and He might have said further, "Ye are the preservers of your race; for your sake this sin-cursed world is not utterly destroyed."

THE MAN BORN BLIND

By Rev. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

THE MAN BORN BLIND

The Witness of Experience

"The man answered and said: Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes."—JOHN ix. 30.

THE whole of this story is inimitably lovely, at least so far as it concerns Jesus and the man to whom He gave sight. The other persons in it are not very inviting. Christ's enemies never appeared in an uglier attitude than they showed here. Never were they more malicious, vindictive, and intolerant, and never were they more completely baffled and defeated. Never did they show so ridiculous and pitiable a figure as here. An unlearned beggar who had been inspired with honest conviction and fearlessness by the touch of Jesus was more than a match for all their wisdom and cunning. We do not often fall in love with beggars; but we do with this particular one as soon as we hear him speak. There is none of the beggar's whim in this voice. It gives forth a manly ring. Christ had not only given the man new eyes, but the beginnings of a new heart, and that in a very short time. Yesterday a weak, cringing mendicant

pleading for alms, to-day a bit of a hero with grit and independence and something even of the Christian martyr. That, if you think rightly of it, was a greater miracle than the opening of the eyes.

The Pharisees were resolved that Christ should not have the credit of this healing work if they could prevent it: they used all sorts of expedients to get it denied or explained away; they were prepared to bribe the man or frighten him into silence. They wriggled and twisted and changed ground many a time. First, they declared that this was not the same man who had sat by the wayside begging. And then they protested that if he was the same man he had never been blind at all, but had only been shamming. And then, when the miracle had to be admitted, they appealed to the popular prejudice about the Sabbath, and asserted that no man of God would do a work of that kind on the day of rest; and finally, they pompously put forward their own authority, and declared, "We know that this man is a sinner," and if anybody disputes it let him look to the consequences. So they argued, and lied, and brow-beated, and blustered. And here was the simple-minded beggar who had never read a book, never heard of logic—never been to school, yet altogether too much for them; because his soul was illumined with honesty, because faith, gratitude, and love had taken possession of him, because he was absolutely certain that Jesus had done for him a wonderful thing.

See how he returns again and again to this point: you say that He is a sinner—well, I know nothing about that, but one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see: you tell me that you know not

whence He is—well, that is not for me to settle, but I know that He has opened mine eyes: you say that He is not of God—well, He has brought God's light to me. The man has got his feet planted down on that solid fact, and nothing can drive him from it. Questions of theology and logic are not in his line—he is not clever enough to argue with these quibbling schoolmen and professors of infallibility. If he were to engage with them on that ground they would lead his poor mind a bewildering dance through a jungle of incomprehensible words until it lost itself in chaos and madness. He knows better than that. He just holds fast to that one bit of experience which is worth a whole world of theories and propositions. That morning the world was dark to him, there was no sky and no green earth, and human faces were unknown to him except by touch, and he had never seen his own mother. Now the world is bright and beautiful, the sun is shining, and trees and flowers and meadow grass are spread around, and the blue heavens are above him. Behold all things are made new. One saving word, one miraculous touch of this Jesus, have changed his life from a gloomy sepulchre or prison into a spacious palace furnished with all manner of lovely and glorious things. They would as easily persuade him to doubt his own existence, or to believe that he had never been born, as to doubt the kindly, saving, recreative power of the man who had wrought this change in him. You may call Him a sinner, Sabbath breaker, deceiver, or whatever you please. All that I care to know is, that He has done for me what only God could do—what I never believed even God would do. Explain it as you like, here is

the fact, and it is enough for me. He hath opened mine eyes.

Now, there is no getting over that Christian evidence. A man or woman who has any fact like that, any fact at all like that to bring forward in witness of Christ's power, is clad in fire-proof and shot-proof armour against all the thrusts of sceptics and the weapons of unbelief. You may call in question our Saviour's miracles until the time comes when He has worked a truly miraculous change in you, and then all questioning is at an end. You may think that the story of His Resurrection and risen life is beset with difficulties, doubtful and improbable, until His loving power lays hold of you, and creates in you new thoughts and emotions, and then all the difficulties vanish, and the risen Christ is as real to you as if you saw and held Him.

People rarely question the truth of Christianity, if Christian faith has done something for them great and unmistakable. If you find people telling you that they are not at all sure of it, or perhaps confidently declaring that there is nothing in it, you may be sure that they have always been outside it, they have never opened their hearts to it, never put themselves under its influence. There is nothing in it to them, because they have kept it at arm's-length and looked at it from a distance. There are thousands of people who apparently give up religion, they fling it off, they learn even to speak of it with contempt. But most of them have had no religion to give up, they have had nothing but a number of views and opinions which they wore as a garment is worn. Their faith never acted as a lever in their lives, or as a healing

medicine, or even as a tonic. It never became a living part of them. The man who has been caught hold of by the attractive, subduing, conquering power of Jesus, lifted up into another self, made strong where he was weak, merciful where he was hard, sober and pure where he was coarse and sensual, tender, loving, and generous where he was selfish and unpitiful. That man does not often let his religion go, or play fast and loose with his beliefs. He may have hours of backsliding; He may at times be betrayed into actions which are like Peter's denial of his Lord. He may have moments of darkness, but he will very rarely let his faith slip altogether from him. He will hardly ever deliberately question and doubt the divinity and the reality of that saving power which once did such great things for him. No man who has really felt in himself the forces of Christianity will be seriously tempted to question them.

Find some man who has been a drunkard or habitual gambler, or given up to unclean, shameful ways, and is now thoroughly and permanently changed, reformed, redeemed, by the action of faith and the power of Jesus' love. Tell him that the Bible is an untrustworthy book, that the Christian doctrines are unproved, that Christ's saving power is only an imagination. Read out to him a long catalogue of difficulties, discrepancies, and contradictions; pile up before him all the arguments which have been used to prove miracles impossible. He will hardly listen to you—or he will hear you with impatience, perhaps with a laugh of derision. It is as if you flung puff darts, or set yourselves to prove that the sun gives no light. He has one big, momentous, living fact to set

against all your talk. He knows that he was once a vulgar, degraded being, an animal hardly conscious of a soul, a lecherous, swinish, uncontrollable beast, chained, led captive by his lusts, possessed with seven devils, without hope and without shame, sinking down to deeper depths and to very hell. *Now* the devils are gone out of him, the chains are broken, he is clothed and in his right mind, his infernal passions are subdued; his life, which was all foul disease, has been restored to health. He is a free man. And Christ has done it. Christ's cross, Christ's love, Christ's mighty spirit within him. You cannot move this man by sophistical word-fencing and sneers. He will answer as the seeing man did in the story: I know nothing about all your objections and your clever reasonings; one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.

And surely every real Christian has some such answer as that to give; perhaps we have never been raised from the mire, from the slough of filth and moral degradation. We have never been drunkards, adulterers, or anything of that sort. No, but we are hardly Christians at all unless we are conscious of certain things, very wonderful things, which Jesus has done for us, and in us; things which bear witness in our spirits of His divine and miraculous power, things which prove unmistakably that He is a present, living, mighty, shaping power in our lives. If you have none of these things I pity you, I pray and plead for your conversion. But if you have them it will be well-nigh impossible to shake your hold upon Christian truth. I think most of us could say Christ has opened our eyes. He has made us see a hundred

things which we once saw not at all. And He has made us see a hundred other things with wider vision and in clearer light. He has shown us what we were once quite blind to—His own beauty, His all-attractive loveliness, the beauty of His words, the beauty of His sorrows, the beauty of His cross and forgiving love. He has shown us ourselves as we never knew ourselves before. He has made us see all the crooked, dark, petty, mean, and miserable things in ourselves which we used to pass by unconcerned, and He has made us see also our larger capabilities, our better and nobler selves, our immortal hopes and longings, our immeasurable and eternal possibilities. He has opened our eyes to the real meaning of life, given us a larger conception of its responsibilities and duties, its privileges and obligations. He has filled us with thoughts and emotions which expand the whole nature, and made it a path which is lighted up all the way with visions of nobler things. He has opened our eyes to see the faces of our fellow-men as the faces of God's children, and our own brothers. They are all in a measure made new to us, no longer to be envied, competed with, neglected, forgotten, despised, and pushed aside; but loved, pitied, forgiven, prayed for, helped and saved. He has wrought one great miracle in all of us that we love Him. Yes, I call that a miracle. It is nothing less. To love a Being whom we have never seen, whose voice has not been heard upon the earth for eighteen hundred years and more. To love Him as a present living one, as a friend, brother, comforter; to love Him better than friend or brother, with a deep, honest, abiding love, stronger than death, that is a wonderful thing. It is

enough of itself to prove His power. And He has given us all in a measure new hearts, enlarged hearts. There is a volume of tenderness in us, where was once a lump of lead ; and tearful sympathies, where there was once frost ; and big affections and fervours, and perhaps enthusiasm, where there was once a nature hard and narrow and selfish, shut up within itself.

He has made us certainly far braver than we were, able to resist life's temptations, and to meet its difficulties, and bear its ills ; we are all or ought to be more patient in sorrow, more cheerful amid dark things, more hopeful when losses and disappointments are upon us. And perhaps, above all, He has given to us a peace and restfulness of mind about which the men of the world know nothing, and let us into the secret of life's deepest joys. These are but a few things. You could all tell of more if Jesus has been in your lives. Things of which you knew or felt little or nothing, until He had laid His hand upon you, and breathed His spirit into your hearts. And if you have had any measure of such experience, you will need no other arguments to prove Him true, divinely true, for ever and for ever true. You will hold Him fast with all the strength of life, and hold Him faster still in the last lone hour.

You will answer all doubts, as this man did, with the glad "we know."

> "Should all the forms which men devise
> Assault my faith, which treacherous art,
> I'd call them vanity and lies,
> And bind the Gospel to my heart."

THE WITHERED HAND

By Rev. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.

THE WITHERED HAND

MARK iii. 1-5.

IT is a remarkable fact that the Son of God found time for the healing of bodily diseases. He came from heaven to do a spiritual work. He had set before Him the redemption of souls from sin, and their restoration to God, yet He was constantly engaged in curing diseases. One might have supposed that, coming as He did from a painless, sorrowless world, He would have had no sympathy with sufferers, that He would have exhorted such to virtue and self-control, and would have contented himself with arousing in them an expectation of a time coming when pain would be no more. But it was not so. He sympathised so deeply with the ills that flesh is heir to, that it is said, "Himself bore our sins and took our sicknesses," and with a pity as great as His power He laid His hand on the sick folk and healed them.

Yet He had a stupendous spiritual work to do, and only three years of public ministry. In it He was so busy that He had sometimes no leisure so much as to eat, and His only opportunity for prayer was at night-time on the mountain. Still He found time to heal bodily infirmities, nor was there any

hurrying over it as if it were inferior, or as if it were a painful necessity because of the hardness of the people's hearts. He regarded every miracle of healing as being part of His mission equally with His teaching.

This is the more remarkable because in some respects the healing of disease was an inferior work. The body is inferior to the soul, as the tent is to its inmate. Besides this, the effects of such miracles were transient. There was no promise of exemption for the future, and those raised from the dead were afterwards committed to the grave by their sorrowing friends. This temporary blessing was given by One who stood in sight of eternity, who knew that men were on its threshold, and that the ills of the flesh or its pleasures were as nothing compared with what awaited men in the future. He had no scorn for the ills of the present life, and no contempt for its blessings. He was altogether unlike those who groan over the world as being nothing but a vale of tears. Presumably, they would not have brought Lazarus back from the grave, as Jesus did.

It may fairly be asked why Jesus acted thus? Why did he spend much time over miracles of mercy? It has been suggested in reply that it was to excite the attention of the people and to prove His superhuman power. This, however, was never His object, and when He was asked for a sign from heaven He refused to give it. If He had wished to arouse attention He might have hurled Mount Hermon into the depths of the sea, and would not have deliberately chosen to perform such works as we read of in the Gospels. He had better reasons

for these works of mercy. He healed diseases because, as the Conqueror of sin, He wanted to show that He traced disease to its ultimate cause. He rescued a man, though perhaps only momentarily, from the evils which harassed him, because He wished to show that He was the Redeemer of his whole nature, and that the body itself would ultimately be raised incorruptible, when all would hear the voice of the Son of God. Besides this He was the representative of God, and did what He does who constantly heals disease and feeds the hungry. George Macdonald was right when he said: "This, I think, is the true nature of miracles, they are the epitome of God's processes, beheld in connection with their Source." Regarded in that light, miracles are in the highest degree instructive and inspiring. We are all apt to forget God in the processes through which He works, and such forgetfulness could not be better checked than by the miracles of Christ. He did directly what God generally does indirectly. For example, we eat our daily bread, and know the processes through which the corn has passed since the harvest, and perhaps fail to think of God in connection with them, although it was He who gave the seed its life, and strength to the husbandman, and fertility to the ground. But if we saw all these processes concentrated into one act, as they were when Christ fed five thousand men with a few loaves, we should recognise the divine power ever after in the ordinary processes of nature. Thus was it with a miracle like this. If a physician had effected a cure it would have been because God had endued him with power of diagnosis, and had given to the

world medicines or electric force, and to the patient recuperative power ; but we do not recognise Him, or speak always in His honour, when cure comes in this fashion. If, however, the cure came as it did to the man with the withered hand, we should exclaim, "What has God wrought?" The incident, therefore, reminds us that God is the Dispenser of health, the Giver of strength, the Source of all physical blessings, and that we ought, like the Psalmist, to say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases, Who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercy."

We will consider (I.) the occasion, (II.) the suggestiveness, and (III.) the significance of this incident.

I.

The Occasion.

The miracle was wrought on a Sabbath day, and gives some indication as to the use of it. On the previous Sabbath our Lord had walked through the corn-fields, and His disciples, being hungry, plucked some of the barley now nearly ripe (for it was towards the end of April), and rubbing the ears in their hands, they ate of them. But even in that country walk their enemies were on the alert, watching for an opportunity of bringing discredit upon them and their Master. Coming forward, they asked Jesus why He allowed His followers to do what was not lawful on

the Sabbath day. On the instant, with bravery and self-devotion, our Lord flung the shield of His authority over His disciples, and they must have felt as the Greeks were said to have done when Achilles was standing amongst them. Our Lord pointed out that once when David was hungry he had eaten of the holy bread in the Tabernacle, which was against the law of the ritual, for it was intended only for the priests; and yet he was regarded as blameless, because it was necessary for him to sustain his life as the anointed of Jehovah. Besides this, He added, the Pharisees had often themselves been in the temple and seen the priests offering sacrifices, cleaning the altar, busy about the holy place on the Sabbath day. This was work, and the law had forbidden any work to be done, yet no blame was attached to such action, and if the scribes argued it is the temple itself which makes the act sacred, then the reply of our Lord was, "I am greater than the temple. In the truest sense I am the temple, and these men, living in My love and following Me, can find all things and all places sacred." The Sabbath was made for man, and whatever will support life and fit for service may be lawfully and rightly done.

On this second Sabbath similar teaching was given. The residents of Capernaum were assembled in the white marble synagogue which the Roman Centurion had built, and must have been amazed to see the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem. One man had been put in a conspicuous place, who could not fail to arouse attention and pity, and Jesus, seeing him there, said to him, "Stand forth." Then He asked the

question, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" And when they held their peace He said to the man with the withered hand, "Stretch out thine hand," and he stretched it out and it was restored whole as the other. By this miracle Christ taught that not only what was necessary but what was merciful may be done on the Sabbath. In short, that the Sabbath was made for man, and man was not made to observe the Sabbath.

We, as disciples of Christ, are therefore called unto liberty, but we must not use it as an occasion for the flesh, but by love serve one another. We are not to spend the day in self-indulgence and pleasure, nor in doing the kind of work of which the week is already too full, but we are to use it thankfully and freely for the inspiration of ourselves and the blessing of others, and must wisely and bravely defend the integrity and sanctity of the day against all that would destroy it.

II.

The Suggestiveness of the Miracle.

The kindness of our Lord on this occasion was an example for us, and the Church is following it more nobly now than ever. There was no kind of pain or sorrow that Jesus would not willingly relieve; cases which no one else could cure He healed. People who had never had a kindly word, lepers and out-

casts, were welcomed and blessed. He was like the Heavenly Father who sends His rain and sun upon the unthankful and the unworthy. Those who attribute philanthropy to a Christless civilisation are shallow students of history, for nothing of this was known before the Advent of Christ. We can hardly imagine human society as it existed outside the Jewish nation, for though we have some accounts of armies and courts, little is said about the poor, the sick, and the slaves. At its worst times the Christian Church has been infinitely better than Paganism at its best. Even in the Dark Ages, when Christianity was corrupt, the mediæval Church stood up for the weak and gave doles to the poor, and preserved learning, and defended the helpless against the rapine of the barons. With all its faults, even then it was a blessing to the world. But now we can think of a far greater ministry of mercy. We have hospitals for the sick, institutions to meet every kind of distress, orphanages in which little ones are tended and trained; and the mere list of institutions which found their germ in the example of Christ might prove an eloquent sermon on His influence. Nor must we forget quiet work which makes heaven glad—loving words to little children, brave rebukes of what is sinful, kindness to those who are poor and ill, as if already we were seeking to hasten the time when God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.

III.

The Significance of the Miracle.

The nature of the change effected in this man's experience may teach us important lessons. His limb was wasted, had lost its power, and the disease which had affected it was established and incurable. He was a piteous spectacle—a man full of vigour, yet unable to work and dependent on charity. In the Apocryphal Gospel, according to the Hebrews, which was accepted by the Nazarenes and the Ebionites, he is said to have been a mason, and that he asked our Lord to heal him in order that he might no longer have to beg his daily bread. This was the sort of plea that would touch the Saviour's heart, and the man asked for the very kind of blessing He would like to give. The Lord, therefore, restored to him power to do work, and there are few blessings greater than to eat bread which has been sweetened by the labour which made it our own.

He is willing also to give us power to do other work. There are sins within, and evils around, which have to be fought against, and to this conflict we are all called, and if any one says, "I cannot give to the poor, or visit the sick, or teach the ignorant, or lead another to the feet of Jesus, or even lay hold of salvation for myself," he is as one with a withered hand. Such incapacity sometimes finds its root in sin; perhaps it is self-consideration which will not allow

one to sacrifice time, or pride which refuses to give up old habits, or avarice which would keep all one gains, or distrust of God which prevents any venture into new effort or service. He is able to reveal the sin, and to destroy it, and He only. Our fellow-men can only advise us and entreat us, and can do no more than the physicians did for this poor sufferer; but if the prayer arises to Christ from each, "Lord, have mercy upon me," each one may feel the stirring of a new power and of a fresh purpose, and respond as Saul of Tarsus did, in the words, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

There can, however, be no benediction unless, as on the part of this man, there is receptivity. If we would ourselves receive it, we must remember that what we see in that patient is what Christ is waiting for in us. Possibly the man went to the synagogue expecting nothing wonderful, but because he went he was in the right place to receive a blessing, and he found healing there suddenly as the man found the treasure hid in the field. And thus many have entered the House of God to be pleased or even amused, and unexpectedly and undeservedly have found salvation in Christ. But restoration can never come to any who are unwilling to obey the word of Christ. When this man heard the command, "Stand forth," he did so without hesitation, and because he did that he was soon able to do more. Similarly, if the Lord says to any one of us, "Give up that sin," or "Bow down in penitential prayer," and there is hesitation and delay, the blessing may elude us, for if we do not obey the command, "Stand forth," we may never hear the command, "Stretch out thine hand."

Like this man who believed and obeyed boldly in the presence of our Lord's foes, who, in making the effort, had the power given him, so we, if true to convictions and to impulse, shall find the assurance true, "To him that hath more shall be given, and he shall have abundantly."

THE TOUCH OF JESUS

The Woman with a Spirit of Infirmity

By Rev. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.

THE TOUCH OF JESUS

The Woman with a Spirit of Infirmity

"And he laid his hands on her; and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God."—Luke xiii. 13.

This poor woman was bowed down in mind as well as in body — she had a *spirit* of infirmity. Brooding over her helplessness and apparent hopelessness, she needed exactly what Jesus gave her, a pitiful touch, which would assure her of brotherliness, and of a love more than human. It was not enough for Him to call her and speak to her, but He laid His hands on her, and she who had been for eighteen years a burden to her friends and the butt of the mischievous, was instantly inspired with new hope and strength.

This was by no means the only occasion on which Jesus laid His hand of love on those who needed power and health.

I.

Let us think of some of those occasions, (i.), partly to remind ourselves of Christ's love, and (ii.), partly to learn how we may discharge our responsibilities in regard to those around us, who will know His ministry best through our repetition of it.

It was considered a wonderful act of condescension on the part of King George III. to enter the tent of a dying gipsy woman in Windsor forest, and talk to her on religious subjects. The story ran through the country like wildfire. But what was that to the condescension of Him who was co-equal with the Eternal Father, yet stooped so low as to take upon Him the form of a servant, and who put Himself into personal contact with those from whom many of us would shrink.

1. *Notably that was so with the leper mentioned in Matthew viii.* 3.

He was unclean according to the law of Moses, and the strict custom of the people; an outcast from home, and from the sanctuary, more to be avoided than the smallpox patient among ourselves. Yet when he came to Jesus, who could have cured him at a safe distance (as He had cured the nobleman's son, and the Centurion's servant), we read, "And Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean," and immediately his leprosy was cleansed. It was an act so unusual, so

horrifying, so certain to render Jesus also ceremonially unclean, that it is no wonder Mark says that afterwards Jesus "could no more enter into the city, but was without in desert places, and they came to Him from every quarter"—the power of His attractiveness overcoming the scruples of ceremonialism in the case of those who could not do without Him. There was cleansing power in His very presence, and not only did leprosy flee before Him, but the moral uncleanness which it represented fled too. In this sense Jesus was the true Light of the World, for, like natural light, He was the great detergent and disinfectant, the most effective destroyer of all germs of disease and death. It is not in vain that we pray to Him, who is the world's eternal light:

"Come, shine away my sin."

And "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanseth us from all sin."

2. *Think next of the whole cycle of miracles, in which illnesses and afflictions of various kinds were removed.*

They are typical of conditions of moral weakness, and of spiritual debility, which are sadly common among us. The fever of Peter's wife's mother, for example, was a symbol of the feverish ways and tempers which we are troubled with, sapping our strength for happy and successful service. The powerlessness of this poor woman, who was bowed down and unable to lift up herself, was a type of despondency which is hard to overcome, which no

human argument will conquer, and no human sympathy can do much to alleviate. But the touch of Jesus still has vitalising power. Close personal intercourse with Him gives vigour to faith and hope, and inspires for service those who have neither great mental power, nor much social influence. This, however, cannot come as the result of anything short of personal contact with Him. You may belong to a congregation amid which He works, without receiving any more good from Him than did the bulk of the people who circled around Him in Galilee. But He speaks to you if you will but listen, He puts forth His hand to you if you will not shrink away. Believe me, that if you are conscious of that, if you really feel that He is beside you, if you adore Him and submit to Him as your Lord, He will strengthen you to bear all burdens, and will lift you up from despondency, so that, like that poor woman, you may become straight, and may glorify God.

3. *Turn your attention next to another cycle of miracles, namely, those which brought blessing to people who had been deprived of certain senses and capacities, in which others rejoiced: the gifts of hearing, of sight, and of speech.*

Again and again we read of these, what appears to have been generally characteristic of our Lord's method, which was one of personal contact, that He touched as well as spoke. Recall, for example, the incident which occurred in the borders of Decapolis, recorded in Mark vii. 32: "And they bring unto Him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech, and they beseech Him to put His hand upon him." Turn also to the story of the blind man

at Bethsaida, narrated in Mark viii. 23, which runs: "And He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when He had spit on his eyes, and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw ought? After that He put His hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up, and he was restored, and saw every man clearly."

This is what we want, that by some means Jesus should make us "look up": above the earthly objects which too often absorb us; above the sensuous view of things which makes us depressed and despairing; above the human agency, and the human friends who often fail us when most we want them. No reasoning will teach us this—nothing but the touch of Jesus, the personal contact with Him which will make Him real, and keep us trustful. If you try to argue with an agnostic, you soon find your own helplessness in convincing him; for this kind goes not out save by prayer and fasting, by that devout seeking after God which draws away from what is animal, sensuous, and temporal, and reveals to the clear eye of faith what no man hath seen, nor can see at any time, by natural vision, or mental effort. How many around us are as deaf to God's voice as the man in Decapolis was to the voices of his friends, till Jesus touched him. How many are blind to all spiritual realities, as the man of Bethsaida, till Jesus took him by the hand, and led him out of the town!

It seems to me that Professor Henry Drummond was right when he said, "The Christian apologist never further misses the mark than when he refuses the testimony of the agnostic to himself. When the

agnostic tells me he is blind, and deaf, dumb, torpid, and dead to the spiritual world, I must believe him. Jesus tells me that. Paul tells me that. Science tells me that. He knows nothing of this outermost circle; and we are compelled to trust his sincerity as readily, when he deplores it, as if, being a man without an ear, he professed to know nothing of a musical world, or, being without taste, of a world of art. The nescience of human agnostic philosophy is the proof from experience that to be carnally minded is death."

Faith, which is to us a new sense, the eye of the soul, the evidence of things not seen, is, as we are told, the gift of God. Only Jesus can impart it, as He only could give sight to the blind in the old days; and therefore, instead of arguing too often with those who believe not, pray for them, make one after another the subject of personal, pleading, persevering prayer, that you may be like those of whom we read, "They brought him to Jesus, that He might put His hands upon him." No matter what the crowd may be, He cares for each, and though the multitude throng Him, and press Him, He will lay His hands on every one of them, and heal them.

4. *One other example of human helplessness shall have our attention, namely, that which is confronted by assaults of evil from without.*

This is beautifully illustrated by Peter's experience, when, trying to walk on the water to go to Jesus, "he saw the wind boisterous, and was afraid, and beginning to sink, cried, Lord, save me! and immediately Jesus put forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

That is an experience repeated again and again among the Lord's followers. We adventure ourselves upon some sea of temptation, confident in our power of being able to hold our own. Or, we cast ourselves into some responsible position, sure that we shall be strong enough to discharge its duties. But the wind is boisterous, difficulty we did not foresee springs up, our strength begins to fail, our pluck to go, and we begin to sink; till we cry, "Lord, save me"; and no sooner are we sure that we have hold of Him, and He of us, than all is well. What we want, brethren, for our safety and our peace, is to "link our earthly feebleness with His almighty arm." Good old Thomas Manton, the Puritan, puts it well (although as quaintly as is his wont) when he says: "We cannot stand a moment longer than God upholdeth us; we are as a staff in the hand of a man; take away the hand, and the staff falleth to the ground; or, rather, as a little infant in the nurse's hand; if we are left to our own feet we shall soon fall. Created grace will never hold out against so many difficulties. One of the Fathers bringeth in the flesh, saying, '*Ego deficiam*, I shall fail'; the world, '*Ego decipiam*, I will deceive them'; the devil, '*Ego eripiam*, I will sweep them away'; but God saith, '*Ego custodiam*, I will keep them, I will never fail them, nor forsake them.' *There* lieth our safety." Let our prayer be "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

II.

It might be well for us also to learn what this touch of Jesus demands of us in the way of response, in order that it may be available and effectual.

Study those typical miracles for yourselves, with a view to discover this, and you will see in those who were blessed what is expected of you. Such as these, for example: Trust is required of you, like that of Peter, who clasped Christ's outstretched hand, as his only hope: Submission like that of the blind man of Bethsaida, who went with the Lord whatever way He led, for all was dark to him, and the Lord knew best: Affection such as even little children showed when they ran at His call, to be taken up in His arms: and friendly loving fellowship, like that of the men who walked with Him through the cornfields, or talked with Him on the road to Emmaus, till their hearts burned within them. "If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall not be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

III.

Let us now see if there is not some instruction here for us as followers of our Lord, which may throw light on our service for Him.

If you compare our text, and other verses similar to it in the Gospels, with certain phrases in the Acts of

the Apostles, you will at once be struck with the similarity. In method, as well as in spirit, those early disciples imitated their Lord; not least in the brotherliness of their service.

Just at the beginning of that wonderful record, we read of Peter and John going up into the temple, and, being filled with the spirit of the Master, they took a poor cripple by the hand, and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength—a miracle which must have done much to remind the people of Jerusalem of the work of the Lord Jesus whom they had crucified. A very similar phrase is used also about the men who, having been scattered abroad by the persecution which arose about Stephen, went everywhere preaching the word. To account for their wonderful success it is said, "The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord"—an expression which is intended to show that He was working with them, and through them; that, in point of fact, they were carrying on, as Luke declares they did, what Jesus began to do and teach; the Acts of the Apostles being the continuation of the same redemptive process which is still going on, and shall go on until the world is won for Christ. Or turn to the several passages where allusion is made to the conferring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and you find that again and again the phrase is used that it was by the laying on of the Apostles' hands that these gifts were imparted.

Now, I say, all this goes to show that the same living Christ is still carrying on His work, and that the Church now is (if I may say so) the hand of the Lord, the means through which His power makes

itself felt ; just as your hand does what you mean to do, and obeys your will. What follows on this? Among other things this—

1. *The condition of the Church's power, or of any Christian's strength, lies in the closeness and the vitality of connection between that Church, or that Christian, and the Lord.*

Let that connection be broken, and nothing will compensate for it. Once suffer prayerlessness to destroy contact, and the supply of force is as completely cut off as electricity would be, if the wire were snapped into the earth. Therefore we have here a call to more earnest prayer, to a deeper sense of our helplessness without Christ, or apart from Him ; and it is just at this point, in a busy life crowded with activities, that danger most threatens us.

Just as the hand of Jesus was the means of blessing because it was directly associated with His life and will, so the Church may be a means of blessing, if only there is close and constant contact with Him who is its soul and life ; for Christ is in us as the hope of glory.

2. *But the other side of this truth must not be forgotten. The hand which expressed the Lord's will was brought into contact with the one whom He intended to bless.*

It was like the ladder which linked heaven's power with earth'sl weakness, as it could not have done unless it had touched *both.* Here, too, is a lesson for us. While we who serve Christ must be in vital fellowship with our Lord, we must also be in loving relation with our fellows, whom we mean to bless. A tree is only healthy when its roots are firmly struck in

the earth, while its branches wave in the air: and your life is wholesome, and healthful to others, when you are in right relations both to heaven and to earth. The saint who holds aloof from his fellows, like St Simon Stylites on his pillar, is not of much practical use to the world he spurns; and he certainly fails to do such work as Jesus did. On the other hand, the man who moves among his fellows, and works among them, with no thought of the God above him, will never raise them heavenward. Seek, then, to be godly, as well as brotherly. Remember you are called on to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and strength, and also your neighbour as yourself; and obedience to both these commands is in essence obedience to all the commands that God ever gave.

O! that the life of Jesus in some small measure may be repeated in us! Then, from the outgoing of divine power, which He imparts, the miseries of the world will be alleviated, and its sins rebuked, and chased away; till, in the new heaven and new earth, in which righteousness and love shall dwell, Christ shall reign for ever and ever. Amen.

THE HEALING OF THE MAN WITH THE DROPSY

By Rev. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.

THE HEALING OF THE MAN WITH THE DROPSY

LUKE xiv. 1-6.

THIS incident occurs in the section of his Gospel which St Luke devotes to describing the Lord's journeyings towards Jerusalem ; but beyond this there is nothing to determine the exact time or place of its occurrence.

Jesus had been invited by one of the rulers of the Pharisees to a Sabbath meal in his house, and notwithstanding the judgments He had already found it necessary to pass upon the Pharisees (Luke xi. 37-44) He had accepted the invitation, evidently in the hope that He might be able to turn the opportunity to good account. It may seem strange to us, perhaps, at first sight that such an entertainment should have taken place on the Sabbath at all. But so far from the Jews regarding the Sabbath as a day only of austerity and gloom, it was their favourite day for festal gatherings, a practice which they justified by an appeal to Nehemiah viii. 10 ("Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto him for whom nothing is prepared : for this day is holy unto our Lord : neither be ye grieved ; for the joy of the

Lord is your strength"); but which was rapidly degenerating into an opportunity for undue luxury and excess.

We are not told what was the motive of the host himself in inviting Jesus on the present occasion; but to the other guests it afforded an opportunity for that sinister espionage, which had now become the habitual attitude of the Pharisees towards Him (see Luke xi. 53, 54, and compare Luke xx. 20). "And they watched Him," or more literally, "And they themselves were persistently watching Him." Nor was it long before they found what seemed likely to prove an excellent occasion for attack.

"And behold, there was before Him a certain man which had the dropsy." It has been conjectured that the man had been actually brought there by the Pharisees as a trap, but if so he himself was clearly not privy to it. And it is more probable that he had either been drawn to the house by curiosity—a curiosity which he would have no difficulty in gratifying, as at an Eastern entertainment the door was always left open (compare Luke vii. 36, 37)—or that he had come in the express hope of being healed. In any case the man did not rest until he found himself in the immediate presence of Jesus. And no sooner had the loving glance that nothing escaped fallen upon him, than, realising the poor sufferer's need, and conscious at the same moment of the malicious attitude of the onlookers, the Lord boldly took the initiative with the challenge, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"

It was a challenge for which the Pharisees were not prepared, and placed them in an awkward

dilemma. They did not wish to say that under such circumstances healing was allowable: they did not dare to say that it was not. Baffled and beaten, they "held their peace."

"And Jesus took him, and healed him." He read the man's unspoken faith, as He had read the unspoken hostility of the Pharisees, and worked the cure for which the man himself had not had the courage to ask. And then, out of kindly consideration for his feelings, He "let him go," or rather, "dismissed him," before resuming His conversation with the other guests.

Upon the general course of that conversation we cannot enter just now. It forms one of the most searching exposures of Pharisaic pretensions to be found in the Gospels. All that we are concerned with is the justification that Jesus here offered of His working this miracle on the Sabbath. It took the form of an *argumentum ad hominem.* Instead of quoting a Scripture precedent as He had once done in defence of His disciples' conduct on the Sabbath day (Luke vi. 3-5), or basing His defence, as on another occasion, on the unceasing providential working of God (John v. 17), He appealed directly to the common practice of the Pharisees themselves. "And He said unto them, which of you shall have an ass," or according to the best attested reading "a son," "or an ox fallen into a well, and will not straightway draw him up on a Sabbath day?" "Even you Pharisees, that is, will admit that there are cases in which mercy is above the ceremonial law. And if you do not scruple to break the Sabbath sanctity by saving a life in which you are interested, how much

more should you be ready to see Me extending help in a case where the element of selfishness is wholly wanting?"

"And they could not answer again unto these things." Their only refuge was in silence. And yet if silent the Pharisees were not convinced, and the future course of events was to show them the more bitter and determined opponents of the Lord. So truly in their case was the old prophetic word fulfilled: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not" (Isaiah vi. 9).

THE HEALING OF THE TEN LEPERS

By Rev. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

THE HEALING OF THE TEN LEPERS

"But where are the nine?"—LUKE xvii. 17.

IT is customary to put what are called "watermarks" in paper by which manufacturers identify their own work, and defend themselves and their customers from imitations. Not long ago a fraud was detected by holding a forged document against the light, the paper being found to bear a date later than that inscribed by the forger's pen. When an antiquarian expert, about twenty years ago, offered a bundle of old Hebrew MSS. to the British Museum, smelling of ancient spices and containing the earliest version of several Bible books, the swindle was detected by analysing the scrip, and proving that it was all of modern manufacture.

There are certain watermarks in the miracles of Christ which help our faith to recognise their genuineness. This miracle, I think, is full of them, not only in the fidelity of the narrative to the customs of the day—the writer being a Greek—but in the character of the miracle itself. While on our way to the lessons which the parable contains for us, let us look at the story for a moment.

I.

"Watermarks" in the narrative.

1. *It throws many subtle and suggestive sidelights on the Saviour's personality.*

His goodness and unselfishness were constantly shown in His thought and care for others when on His way to the last Passover and the great sorrow of His life. Though He knew all that was to befall Him, He never lost His interest in the men and women around Him through selfish absorption in His own trouble. How sorrow blinds most of us to the needs and miseries of others! Many people who have any pain or affliction to bear demand the whole attention of those around them and give none in return, and some will not readily talk about anything else than their trouble. But He left us an example in this too—that it is possible to face the most dire calamities, nay, even to prepare ourselves for them, by being accessible to the call of others' need, and busying ourselves in helping them. From the moment when the Cross loomed up before Jesus, to the moment when He breathed His last upon the "accursed tree," you will find no hint of failing interest on His part in the men and women around Him. Rather does His interest take a wider sweep, His love a warmer colour, His pity a tenderer quality. The first effect of that vision of the Cross was to quicken His steps "in going about," and to make His hands busier in "doing good" (Acts x. 38). Knowing how brief a time remained for Him, He

said, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day, for the night cometh, when no man can work." And what were these works of God? The healing of the sick, the lifting of burdens, the comforting of the sad, the strengthening of the meek, and so the latter days of Jesus were full of gracious deeds and words which shed light and gladness and health around Him.

2. *There is something characteristic, too, in the sensitiveness of our Lord to the varying response that was made to His healing energies.*

He asked for no return, but dispensed His favour freely, "all of grace." Ten wretched men, suffering from a loathesome disease, condemned to perpetual isolation from their kind, and obliged to keep a certain distance even from passing wayfarers, met Him away on the hillside. Such a sight would always draw the eyes of the Good Shepherd, and His heart would yearn towards them. Just because they were friendless, outcast, divorced for ever from wife and children and home, miserable and ill—they were His friends, and He was their friend. And while He had no favours to bestow that kings would value, He had a largesse of help to give to such as these, and His ear was ever open to their cry.

But though He cared nothing for any return for His kindness, so far as He Himself was concerned, the story shows that He was deeply sensitive to the way these men behaved after their cure. Their attitude was correct enough beforehand—"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Perhaps one of these poor fellows had, earlier in our Lord's ministry, seen Him perform a healing act on some other leper,

little thinking that presently he himself would be driven out from among his kind as a tainted and doomed man. From that moment he would brood over that wonderful cure, and talk about it to his fellow unfortunates, and they would all wish passionately that they too might meet this Good Physician on His travels. But they had been driven out of the track of traffic, and there was little chance that He would pass their way. But suddenly, one day, this man would start as they saw a little party of travellers wending their way along that unfrequented highway between Galilee and Samaria, and he would say, "Lo! Jesus of Nazareth in very deed, and His disciples! He has come, His very self, and if we can draw His attention He will heal us!" And then the cry would rise, loud, insistent, wailing, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" The Master heard, and released them from their bondage of disease and banishment, and said, "Go, show yourselves to your priests. And it came to pass that, as they went, they were healed."

Was that all? Did Jesus then pass on, having dismissed that disappearing group of men out of His mind? One can see His quiet glance of watchfulness as they went further and further into the distance. On they swept, without pausing to look back, showing by their gait that they were in transport of joy at their cure, and in a frenzy of haste to receive the priestly absolution from banishment—for had they not all some one dear whose face they longed to see, and hand to clasp? Suddenly, however, one of them separates from the

others, and he is seen running back swiftly, like one in abounding health, shouting out his praise to God, and eager to pour out his thanks to his kind benefactor. "And one of them, when he saw he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down at His feet, giving Him thanks, and he was a Samaritan."

This was an act dear to the heart of Jesus, and He showed it in a characteristic outpouring of mingled joy and sadness. Joy at the sight of a man who could be grateful for a kindness, and who, being healed of a grievous disease, thought first of God the Giver of every good and perfect gift, then of the Good Physician who had brought the healing grace of God to him, and only last of all of the formal process of ceremonial cleansing which would make him a free man in form as well as fact. But sadness too: for ten were healed, and here was but one to give thanks. Jesus thought of the contrast with shame. Only one out of ten with a thought of the divine blessing he had received; and this man not an Israelite at all, but a Samaritan! And Jesus answering, said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God save this stranger—this alien!"

3. *One other characteristic touch in this narrative we will mention before passing on. It is the way in which Jesus, having given this man health, crowns His blessing by recognising and perfecting the work of grace in his heart.*

"And He said unto him, Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole."

This does not mean that this man alone was

ultimately cleansed out of the ten. It was not the manner of Jesus to withdraw His gifts because they were not appreciated at their true worth, any more than it is the Father's way to take back His blessings from men who misuse them; for He "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust," and "is kind to the unthankful and the evil." But in the mind of Jesus, physical healing was the least part of His purpose in bestowing health on people. He ever thought of their souls; and unless the bodily benefit He bestowed blossomed into some spiritual grace, He was troubled and unsatisfied. Those nine had been healed, and remained healed, but they were not "made whole"; only he could be made whole who was lifted into the circle of divine relationship, and acknowledged God as the Giver of health and all good things.

All these and other features in this beautiful incident carry with them a sense of genuineness and authenticity. This was how Jesus would think and act; this was what He would inevitably say: the story bears the "watermark" of His own Personality in every line and particular.

II.

Now, as "every miracle is a parable of the higher life," what is the teaching of this deed of healing and mercy for us to-day?

There are certain incidental lessons that stand out as we pass them by. Matthew Henry, for instance,

in commenting on this passage, points out, in his terse and shrewd manner, as one of these—"How often are those most grateful from whom least is expected?" Dr Taylor, in his book on the *Miracles of our Saviour*, turns this thought round and says, "We are reminded by this narrative, that we often get least where we might have looked for most." The nine Israelites, in spite of their higher training and greater privileges, accepted their healing without acknowledgment, took it almost as a matter of course, while the man who returned full of gratitude was a despised Samaritan. These, however, are lessons of worldly wisdom, such as any observant man would be able to find in the course of a day's dealings with his fellow-men, rather than the essential feature of this miracle. A much finer lesson is mentioned by Dr Taylor, where he says that this incident shows how "gratitude for one blessing secures the reception of another and a higher. This man came to thank Jesus for the cure of his leprosy, and received from Him the salvation of his soul." And yet I cannot help feeling that there is something deeper and finer still to be learned from this beautiful incident. Perhaps it can be best put thus—"What gives true value to our temporal blessings is that principle of gratitude and faith which recognises everything as the gift of God's love and goodness."

1. *This makes the difference between the worldly man and the Christian.*

The secular temper takes everything as it comes, without any realisation of its divine source; the spiritual temper refers everything to its heavenly origin and author. "Where does the corn come from?" "From the ground," says the materialist;

"from the Father of lights," says the Christian. And there is a whole world of difference between these points of view. If we stop with Nature, which produces corn and wine and fruit, and whose laws become our willing servants when once we learn to understand and control them: we may possess continents, and yet our souls be starved. But he who lifts his eyes above, and sees in every fact a blessing, in every possession a gift, in every incident a divine influence, will live a life in which all lower good is still his, but crowned with a higher good that redoubles its value and makes it a spiritual treasure beyond price.

2. *Thus the spirit of gratitude to God, of thanksgiving to Him as the Giver of life, and what makes life precious, is of the essence of religion.*

It is here that the first test of religion comes. There are other, and in a sense higher, tests, but this at least must be complied with. The first link that binds us to God is a sense of dependence; the second is a sense of gratitude.

And what a difference there is when this element enters heartily into our views of life!

A man eats a good meal. Does it make no difference whether he does or does not think of the Giver of all food and sustenance? Whether he conforms to the good old-fashioned but fast vanishing custom of giving thanks or of asking a blessing? If he has gratitude in his heart to the Father who has provided the meal (no matter who has sold or bought it), the meal will be a sacrament, and the enjoyment of it will be a means of grace to him and his.

You go out into the country on a sweet summer's

day, and revel in the sight of a beautiful landscape, and listen to the birds, and watch the dappled shadows in the woodlands. Does it make no difference whether you take it all as a mere physical fact, or, on the other hand, recognise the presence of the beneficent Spirit who pervades all things and fills them with His glory, and makes them glow with light and colour till you worship in your heart, whispering, "This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven"?

You are surrounded by a happy home and circle of friends, and your days are full of innocent sources of satisfaction; your cup of life is full, and runneth over. Is it nothing whether, on the one hand, you simply take these blessings for granted, using them as mere things, whose sweetness is to be extracted to the full, but having no meaning beyond that which meets your eye and sense; or whether you see in it all a manifestation of the goodness of the Creator and Sustainer of your life, and an appeal to Him from you to hallow these blessings by a thankful spirit and an unselfish response?

And when we rise into the region of the spirit, and deal with the realities of the soul, we are met with the fact that, apart from faith in the good God, the Saviour of men, these things have no meaning at all, or only a dwarfed and stunted meaning at best. Religion without gratitude is body without soul, form without reality. For religion on our side is response to the love and grace of God, and that response must in the first place take the shape of thanksgiving and praise for what God is to us, and what He has done for us.

This is why Jesus was glad at the return of the one leper, and sad at the failure of the nine. He did not thirst for vainglorious praise; but He valued and looked for gratitude because He knew that only such a temper is worthy of a man. The poor leper at His feet, glowing and panting with broken phrases of thanksgiving to God, and to Jesus Himself—how his soul was enlarged by this noble response to a noble deed! And those mean-spirited wretches in the distance, whose only thought was for themselves —how dwarfed in feeling and thought their selfishness made them! Those were healed; yes, but that was all; their soul had no share in the benefit. But this man was not only healed, but "made whole"; his entire nature, soul, and body, was cleansed, disinfected, made fresh and clean, because he had bathed himself in floods of grateful feeling, and had forgotten the physical side of the gift that had come to him in an overpowering, passionate gratitude to the Giver.

> "Life is only bright when it proceedeth
> Towards a truer, deeper Life above;
> Human love is sweetest when it leadeth
> To a more divine and perfect Love."

"Love God, and you will throw off the love of self; love God, and you will love all that He gives you to love, for love of Him."

For this sense of gratitude does not end with itself; it seeks to express itself in some form of service for others. Thanksgiving, when perfect, goes out in benefit. We long to do something for Him who loves us, and gave Himself for us; and this service is religion in practice, as gratitude is religion in

feeling. "The love of Christ constraineth us," said St Paul; and in saying that he gives us the secret of his own grand life, and of all other grand lives that have benefited and uplifted the world. Do all, then, for "the sake of the name," and your life will be sweet at the core, and full of benefit to its uttermost extremities. To love God, and to serve Christ by serving the world for which He died—this is to be a Christian.

FAITH TRIUMPHANT OVER HINDRANCES

The Healing of the Daughter of the Syrophœnician Woman

By Rev. W. J. TOWNSEND, D.D.

FAITH TRIUMPHANT OVER HINDRANCES

The Healing of the Daughter of the Syrophœnician Woman

"O woman, great is thy faith; be it done unto thee even as thou wilt."—Matthew xv. 28.

The third year of the ministry of Jesus was a crucial one in several respects. He was popular with the multitude, and He was feared and hated by the classes. The people would have taken Him and made Him a king, as though to fulfil the predictions of their prophets concerning a conquering Messiah. The Pharisees, rulers, and priests would have pursued Him to the death to satisfy their hatred and jealousy concerning Him. It might be that Jesus retired to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon to escape both these dangers.

There was another reason which might be supposed to actuate our Lord in thus moving towards the extreme north of the land. The disciples, as the end came near, required to be taught more fully the divine necessity which was impelling their Master

towards the dread tragedy of Calvary. Two days' journey from the Lake of Gennesaret, He stood on the strip of level ground which divides the hills of Galilee from the sea, and looked down on the factories, mansions, palaces, and public buildings of Tyre and Sidon, the two great workshops of the East. The populations of those cities were an accursed race. They came from the Canaanites of the old time, they were worshippers of Baal and Ashtoreth, by whose obscene rites Israel had often been beguiled into shameful sin, and to the later generations of the Jews, they were a people outcast from God and all spiritual privilege.

It is not said that Jesus passed into the heathen territory. It is more probable that He stayed on the borderland. There many Jews resided, carrying on extensive commerce with their heathen neighbours. But the fame of Jesus had spread thither, and it was speedily buzzed abroad that the Prophet of Galilee was in the neighbourhood.

It was quite true that the mission of Jesus was primarily to the Jews. They had been under preparatory training for Christ for many centuries. Humble, meek, unsophisticated souls among them were ready to hail the Christ, even though He came in unkingly guise. But the mass of them were hardened in prejudice, in spiritual pride, and ritualistic righteousness. Therefore they saw no Christ in Jesus, but a teacher who ruthlessly denounced their hypocrisy and formalism. If they had with readiness recognised the credentials of Jesus, and owned Him as their long-expected Messiah, the world would have had a nation of missionaries, proclaiming

a Saviour and a King of men. Ages of darkness and unbelief might have been saved to the race, the whole world ere this might have been drawn into the kingdom of God.

The true genius of Christ's message as a universal Gospel was abundantly evidenced by Him in His ministry. His ready sympathy with the outcast and the poor, His glad recognition of Gentile faith and piety, His repeated declarations as to the entrance of the heathen into the fold, all pointed to a universal offer of salvation. But meantime, the Jews, as the prepared people, must have a distinct call to the blessings of the Gospel that they might have the opportunity of fulfilling their great destiny as the messengers of grace to all mankind. These facts will clear the way for a full understanding of the remarkable events surrounding the text.

Jesus could not be hid. In this distant retreat He was discovered by a remarkable suppliant. A woman of Canaan came out of the coasts and cried unto Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." The woman was a Canaanite by birth, a Syro-phœnician by residence, a Greek by language and religion. The latter reference makes her an idolater; but the fame of Jesus as a healer aroused her maternal instincts, while the rumours concerning Him as the long-expected Christ, anticipated not only by the Jews but by all nations, led her to conclude that He must be the hope and King of men come at last. Therefore, with a strong hand, she grasped the truth concerning Jesus. She gave Him His legitimate titles. He was the Lord of life, of

nature, of man ; He was the Son of David, predicted, expected, arrived. While the priests and rulers, the Pharisees and Sadducees, criticised and doubted Him, this woman believed, and therefore brought to Him her sorrow and her need, urging them on Him with a persistency which was born of strong conviction and confidence.

The woman had "a little daughter," as Mark calls her, who "had an unclean spirit." The child was in an evil case, "grievously vexed with a demon," Matthew says, and therefore torn and racked in mind and body with overpowering and distressing agony. The mother was scarcely less afflicted than her daughter. Every motherly instinct was aroused into strained sympathy and distress ; it was a daily sword in her heart which no earthly agency could remove. Therefore, when she heard of the advent in the neighbouring coasts of a wonder-working Healer, when He was reported to be the long-expected Messiah of Israel, her hope was quickened, desire such as only a mother can feel for an afflicted child took possession of her, and these begot within her soul a faith, dim and crude at first, but which by-and-bye became the means of securing a royal boon for her and her afflicted child. The faith once kindled led her to a venturesome step. As the eagle casts himself in the early sunrise on the ambient air, so she boldly cast herself on the mercy of Jesus and claimed a blessing. But she had a strange reception. Coldness, silence, tacit repulsion on the part of the Saviour. No other suppliant was ever so treated. The disciples themselves must have been astonished, and perhaps read in the stony treatment of the woman confirmation of

the rejection of the heathen, and of the spiritual privileges exclusively secured to Israel. With the callous bigotry, characteristic of their race, they steeled themselves against a mother's cry and a sufferer's need, they only saw a foreign heathen, a Gentile outcast, a dog, troubling their Master; and in the spirit of exclusiveness, they said to Him, "Send her away, for she crieth after us." It was a trying position for the suppliant. Silence from the Master, insult from His followers: who could stand against such rebuffs? The conduct of the disciples was but characteristic of the spirit they still cherished as to aliens from Israel. If Christ made no response to the woman's plea, He had no word of reproach or unkindness; if there was no gracious reception, there was no heartless repulse; if the blessing was not given, it was not, as yet, denied. Therefore, the woman did not turn with a broken heart from Jesus. Her mother's love gave her strength to bear the disappointment, and persevere with her prayer. It was a strange line for Jesus to take. He could not be acting a part in accommodation to the prejudices of the disciples; He could not be indifferent to the suppliant's prayer; it could not be that He had unwillingness in His heart which was to be subdued by the importunity of the woman. Therefore it must be concluded that He read the true inwardness of the woman. Her possibilities of faith and confidence were far beyond anything He had met with even in Israel. These should be brought into the open, they should be an example to the world for all time, they should be hung up on high for a memorial of her. Therefore He tested and tried her patience by the

chilling answer, "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel."

The thundercloud was gathering and deepening in blackness. What the lost sheep of Phœnicia felt it is impossible to say. The answer of Jesus, after a mortifying interval of silence on His part, and contemptuous insult from the disciples, was one of religious exclusiveness and sectarian partiality. Can we suppose that her faith did not for a moment falter? Was there not the sad feeling that her suit was hopeless? Then her faith rallied, her daughter's need impelled her to another effort, her faith took another venturous leap, for faith in exercise is wondrously daring, and she seems to have reasoned after this fashion, although faith's processes of thought, unlike those of reason, are rapid, and gain remote conclusions at a jump. "He is not sent, but is He not the Lord, is He not the Kingly Christ, has He a mission so circumscribed as to be shut up in such narrow limits as Judah? It is impossible. If I am a Canaanite, am I not in need, is not my case a pressing one, and in the exercise of mercy so rich as He has shown elsewhere, has He touched the extreme boundary of love, or may He not have compassion in His heart for me?" Her faith persevered further. She no longer called Him "Son of David"—the title savoured of partiality and limitation—but she confined herself to the name which spoke of universal sovereignty and lordship. Surely this was a daughter of Abraham. He was father of the faithful, and this woman had a faith much more precious than gold which perisheth though it be tried with fire.

But not yet was her faith to receive its reward. It

had a more terrible ordeal to undergo. The cloud darkened and the pressure of trial became heavier. Under other circumstances, it would have been an unjustifiable and merciless ordeal. But both for her own sake and for the world's sake, it had to be proved how much her faith could stand and how brightly it could shine. Christ knew what was in her, the strength and fervour of her love, the tenacity of her resolution, the victory her faith should achieve. Therefore came the worst repulse she was to be called upon to bear. Jesus dissembled His feelings, He stifled the promptings of His living sympathy and compassion. The answer already given withheld the blessing on the ground of the limitation of His commission, but now it seems to be denied because of the unworthiness of the suppliant. Jesus replied: "Let the children first be filled, for it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs."

The Jews were children, the Gentiles dogs. Not the dogs of our day and our country, well fed, well housed and cared for, the friends and companions of man. But the lean, hungry, homeless, masterless dogs of the East, which make the air hideous with their cries, and prowling through the streets, rush in at the open doors where dinner is in progress to pick up the crumbs and fragments, which may always be found when the fingers are the sole instruments used in eating.

It was a hard saying. It shocks our sensibility even although we can take in the whole view of the case, and appreciate the motive of our Lord, but it seemed so cruel a saying to a woman so mighty in faith and spiritual perception that it jars in some

measure upon our tender feeling. But the woman bore the strain nobly. She did not resent the humiliating and insulting comparison, she was willing to bear any hard saying if only she could gain her object, and her faith in Christ did not waver or quail. Therefore, as Luther says, she seized the sword which Jesus had used, and turned it against Himself. As a writer has said: "Men from deep places can see the stars at noonday, and from the utter depths of her self-abasement she catches the whole mystery of heaven." She said, "Yea, Lord, for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the master's table." The retort was a perfect one. Perfect in its humility, in its resolute faith in Him as the Lord of love, in the firmness of her trust in His power to grant her request, and in the skill with which she used the epithet applied to her by Jesus, as the conquering word in the trying interview. "Yea, Lord, we are dogs, impure, outcast, idolatrous, people of a bloody history and of an unclean life, but dogs have a claim to live, they are creatures with a place and a purpose in creation, and they have a right to live. They are not children, nor can they eat the children's bread, but only the dogs; yet the dogs may eat what the children cast away, they may surely snatch a crumb dropped from the children's table. I only ask a crumb, an atom of that mercy which has made Galilee ring with its fame, one taste of that healing stream which has flowed so plenteously among the Jews."

The mask fell from Jesus' face. He could dissemble no more, He could restrain Himself no longer, the surging compassion of His nature, so

long pent up, must have its way, and therefore came the welcome words: "O woman, great is thy faith; for this saying go thy way, the demon is gone out of thy daughter."

It is impossible for us to realise the tone in which Jesus uttered these words, nor the love which beamed in full glory from His eye. Nothing ever drew from our Lord such commendation as the exercise of a supreme faith, and no such instance of it had as yet claimed His approbation. Therefore the unstinted and glad praise of the woman. Faith displays the real nature of a person more than anything else. This faith was so unyielding, so pertinacious, so resolute, that Jesus Himself seemed startled by it, and from His lips there came its warmest encomium. That the blessing followed was a matter of course. The mother was happy. No thanks that rang from her lips are recorded, but her heart was bursting with joy and praise. Her home was no longer darkened by a perpetual gloom. Her little daughter was no longer furious in passion, worn with hysteria, helpless in epilepsy and profane in spirit. No longer was she raving in blasphemy and invective, but when the mother stole into the house it was the abode of peace. The young form lay quiet on her bed, exhausted, probably, by the parting convulsion of the evil spirit, but in calm slumber, and perfect real. Hope was the prevailing light of that dwelling, and thankfulness the strain of every heart.

Herein is one more of the victories of faith. It does remove mountains, it broke down the idea of a mere racial religion and of a local gospel. The disciples with their prejudices and narrow limitations

cried, "Send her away," but she would not go. Jesus subjected her faith to every strain that could test and prove it. He drew back the string of His bow to its extremest tension, and sent the arrow of discouragement to her heart with its greatest force; but unintimidated and still determined, she seized the weapon and sent it back with force as great, and so gained her prize, and won herself an everlasting name.

THE HEALING OF THE DEAF AND DUMB

By Rev. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.

THE HEALING OF THE DEAF AND DUMB

MARK vii. 32-35.

WE ought not to overlook, or to underrate the physical blessings which our Lord gave during His ministry. In His great mercy and infinite generosity, these were sometimes given to those who received no spiritual blessing with them. Herein we find the germ of the good works wrought by the Christian Church, which are more widespread than those produced by any other religious influence. Institutions for the blind, hospitals for the sick, homes for the deaf and dumb, constitute the smiling harvest which sprang from our Lord's seed-sowing. I once visited an institution established for the benefit of the deaf and dumb. Entering a room, I found a class of ten or twelve boys and girls, most of whom had been born deaf, and had therefore never learned how to speak. By the exercise of marvellous patience on the part of their teacher, they had been taught to watch the movements of the tongue and of the facial muscles, until they could *see* speech, and to some extent imitate it. Some of them could understand and reply to what I said, although, of course, I was a stranger to them. That institution, and many like it, sprang from the miracle of the Lord

Jesus; and is an example of the fact that even to the bodies of men, the ministry of Jesus Christ brought untold blessings. We cannot do what He did. Perhaps we cannot do so much as trained teachers do; but at least we can show the sympathy of Jesus to all who suffer such privations; we can allow for the irritability of those who partly hear; we can smooth the way of the blind; we can alleviate the sorrow of those who sit in solitude; in short, we are to be merciful, as our Father in Heaven is merciful; we are to be pitiful, as the Lord Jesus Christ was, when He sighed over this sufferer.

The spiritual significance of the miracle is more important than its physical aspect, because, whilst we are able to speak and hear, we may be deaf to the voice of God, and be dumb when called upon to praise Him, or to pray. And therefore, we need the touch of the Great Physician, and may well put up the prayer:—

> "Oh! make the deaf to hear Thy word,
> And teach the dumb to speak, dear Lord.
> . . . . .
> So they, with us, may evermore
> Such grace, with wondering thanks, adore,
> And endless praise to Thee be given,
> By all the Church in earth and heaven."

I.

Let us first allow our thoughts to dwell on the sufferer brought to Jesus.

He was destitute of two of our noblest faculties —hearing and speech. It was sad enough to see

those young people in the institution referred to; but there were no such alleviations, as they enjoyed, for such sufferers in the days of Jesus. This man had no refuge in reading, which now often lightens such a burden. All around him seemed silent as the grave; nor was he able to express his wants by any of the ingenious methods now known. Sometimes there seems to be pathos even about a babe, with his yearning eyes and inarticulate prattle, for he cannot articulate a word, nor even say to his mother, "I love you"; and one is glad that the wants of such a child are limited, simple, well-known, and easily supplied. But to be a man, with a man's feelings and thoughts without power to express them, would be infinitely more lonely and sad.

Be sure that the angels pity those who never hear the voice of God or the whisper of heaven, for there is an inward and spiritual organ to which Christ referred when He said: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Ministers often proclaim pardon to those who have no consciousness that they need it. Voices may be eloquent of the Heavenly Father's care, and yet many are unconscious of them. Pleading and warning pass by them unheeded. They are deaf. Others are dumb. The voices of some professing Christians are inarticulate, so far as God is concerned. There may be a companion who needs warning, which is not uttered; the cause of Christ may need defending by one who sits silent. There are vices which Christ died to destroy; there are shams which His truth was intended to abolish — about which many are dumb, or they seem to have an impediment in

their speech, and none but Christ, and the sense of His nearness and touch, can arouse these to hearing and speech.

1. *It is somewhat suggestive that these faculties are mutually dependent.*

This man was not absolutely dumb; he could not speak articulately, so that it is said afterwards, "He spake plain," as if he made a weird noise before. It was a perversion of speech—the necessary accompaniment of total deafness, because of which the sufferer could not perceive a mistake. There is a connection between similar faculties in the soul. Our ears must be opened before our mouths can speak plainly for God. If we teach others, we must ourselves be taught. We must hear in darkness, before we can speak in the light, or else, in God's judgment, we shall be stammerers, although physically we are fluent. Right speaking is conditioned by right hearing. I knew a child whose father was so anxious that he should learn to speak French like a native, that he engaged a nurse from Alsace, and both parents resolved never to speak a word of English in the child's hearing. The result was that when the little fellow was five years old, he had the greatest difficulty in learning his mother-tongue. Because he had only heard French, he could speak it only. This has its application to one's higher life, therefore, Jesus says, "Take heed what ye hear." If we hear nothing but evil, and keep clear from religious influences, we are apt to speak evil, so that young Christians especially should read and listen to what will inspire noble thought and pure ideas, avoiding companions whose talk is vain

and idle, if not vicious. They must beware of amusements which suggest what is impure and unholy, and watch against that jesting which is not becoming or holy; and because it is not enough to have the outward watching on our own part, we need to pray, "Create within me a clean heart, O God," for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh.

2. *One has not much faith, however, in human counsel. We must turn to Christ, as this man did who, till he came to His feet, felt himself to be an outcast from hope.*

Probably his friends had heard of some miracles of mercy, and had imagined that he also might possibly be benefited by the touch of Jesus; but although they "brought" him, it was obviously not without his consent, for he was a grown man and not a child. Indeed, perhaps he himself had made signs that he would like to go to the Great Physician, and they, keen to understand, had gladly led him, as every faithful teacher would wish to lead his fellows, to that divine Redeemer, contact with whom brings life to the dead, and health to the weak.

It is possible that in some time of trial we ourselves have thus been brought near. We may have feared when some precious life was trembling in the balance, and realised what a blank it would be if that one were taken from us; and in our agony, alone, we have gone to Him with the prayer, "Lord, save and restore." And it was good for us thus to be brought to our knees, and to be kept there, as it was good for this sufferer. Many have felt Christ to be nearer in time of privation than ever before, perhaps most of all when we have been sensible of moral weakness and

peril, or anxious concerning the moral danger of those dear to us. Conscious that we are able to do no more, we bring such to the Lord, as those who would say, "Thy hand can do what mine cannot."

Explain prayer as we may, its blessings we know, its effects we have experienced, and we may thank God if we have been brought to Jesus, and have brought others to Him.

3. *The giving of the blessing must be left to the Lord's own choice.*

These friends asked Jesus to lay His hands upon the sufferer, for this they had previously seen Him do. Jesus, however, did not do this. If He had done so He might have confirmed their idea of a magic touch, for these were half idolaters. He was desirous of broadening their views, and deepening their expectations, so He chose another method than that which they had thought of, and took the man by the hand and led him apart from the crowd. We need, in all our applications to Him, this spirit of trustfulness and humility, as of those who would say, "Deal with me, Lord, as seems best to Thee. I am willing to lose health, or to give up my position, if only Thou canst save and use me. I want to serve Thee, and to hear Thy voice, and to do Thy work, and share Thy rest. And because Thou art wise and I am ignorant, I trust Thee to do what seems best, and how it seems best, and all the praise shall be Thine."

II.

Let us think now of the method adopted for the sufferer's cure.

Jesus led him apart from others. He dealt with him as He did with the blind man at Bethsaida, whom He took by the hand and led out of the town. The Greek Fathers say that this was to avoid ostentation, but there was no sign of this. Others suggest that Christ could pray better without distraction, but His whole life was a prayer. Surely this separation was for the man's good. Jesus would be alone with him, to get his attention concentrated upon Himself, to deepen spiritual impressions, for, thus alone, the first voice he would hear would be that of his Lord. Men are often nearest to God when the world is furthest from them. Moses knew more of Jehovah in the wilderness of Midian when alone among the sheep, than in the palace of Pharaoh, surrounded by the Egyptian courtiers. David seems to have been less conscious of God's presence on the throne than he had been in the fields of Bethlehem. Our quietest times spiritually are our growing times. It is, perhaps, when we have been alone in our room, too ill to read, having no wish to talk, and too tired to listen, that we have said to ourselves :—

> "Hark! my soul, it is the Lord,
> 'Tis thy Saviour, hear His word,
> Jesus speaks, He speaks to thee,
> Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou Me?"

Or, perhaps, in the silent home, when the blinds have been down, and the spirit has been lonely, and the heart heavy, as we think of the vacant place that cannot again be filled, we have said to ourselves, "The Lord is here." He has taken us by the hand, and led us aside from the multitude, and we thank Him for the quiet, if in it we have learned to know Him better.

The main thing about this cure, and about the spiritual blessings represented by it, is the effect of vital contact with Jesus Christ. We read that our Lord put His fingers in his ears. It must be remembered that the man could not speak or hear, but he could feel and see, and when Jesus touched his ear and his tongue, it would convey to him this thought, "I am going to cure this and that, and this healing power is coming forth from Myself." It was the fulfilment of what was typified in that poor widow's room, when the prophet Elisha stretched himself upon the child, as if he was willing that his own life should be imparted to him. It is personal contact with the Lord which inspires us with new life, and the life becomes more vivid in proportion to our trust, which keeps us in vital contact with Him. This man must have gone with a strange feeling aside from the multitude, when he stood, waiting and hoping, as if he said, "Lord, I want to speak and to hear, and can only cast myself on Thee."

The personal sympathy of the Lord Jesus Christ with us is surely suggested by the phrase, "He looked up to heaven and sighed." He was moved with pity for the sufferer, and felt much as He did when He

wept over the grave of Lazarus, intensely realising the devastation and misery which had followed upon sin. It is a special case of need, physical or spiritual, which makes the world's sadness real to us. If we talk about trouble, it is one thing, but it is quite another to go to some home, where you see the father dying, and the tearful faces of those who are watching beside him, feeling that with his departure all hope will be gone from them. If we read about those who are out of work, we are little affected; but if we go to see one man, who, once a responsible clerk, has lost his situation, and pawned everything on which money can be had, our heart begins to ache, and we know what Jesus felt, when, looking up to heaven, "He sighed."

We want, however, more feeling of sympathy towards those who are lost and sinful, as Christ saw all men to be. Even as Christian workers, some of us become cold and hard in the very activities we undertake. The head may become keen, and the heart may become hard, even in religious enterprise, and we need daily to ask that inwardly we may be conformed to the likeness of Christ. Then we shall not be indifferent to those who never pray, who are sunk in irreligion, if not in pollution. Our hearts would be heavy with pity; our hands would be laden with blessings; and we should appear to our fellows to be not Christians merely, but Christ's men. Through us He will work mightily, and joyfully, and those around us will hear the voice of the Lord Himself through us.

If we have felt the touch of our Lord, and have received sight and hearing from Him, we still need to

keep near Him lest we should lapse into the old indifference, and then our last state would be worse than our first. Therefore, let this be our prayer:

"As Thou hast touched our ears, and taught
Our tongues to speak Thy praises plain,
Quell Thou each thankless, Godless thought
That would make fast our bonds again.

"From worldly strife, from mirth unblest,
Drowning Thy music in the breast,
From foul reproach, from thralling fears,
Preserve, good Lord, thy servants' ears.

"From idle words, that restless throng
And haunt our hearts when we would pray,
From pride's false chime and jarring wrong,
Seal Thou my lips, and guard the way.

"For Thou hast sworn that every ear,
Willing or loth, Thy trump shall hear,
And every tongue unchainèd be
To own no hope, O Lord, but Thee."

If this prayer be answered, we, like this poor man, shall become living witnesses to Christ's power. No trumpet was needed to blare abroad his cure. He quietly went back home, where people saw him and heard him, and said to each other in wonder, "This is the man whom Jesus changed, and he is become a new man."

Thus we may go forth to live for Him. Our words may show forth His praise; our lives may be witnesses to His holiness and love, and through them others may be won to His side. And at last, when our work is done, and we stand tired on the threshold of life, beside the golden gate, the voice shall once

more say, "Ephphatha—Be opened," and we shall enter into the Heavenly Temple, where no ears are deaf, and no tongues are mute, and shall praise Him who has redeemed us to Himself and made us kings and priests unto God forever.

THE FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND

By Rev. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.

THE FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND

MATTHEW xv. 32-39; MARK viii. 1-9.

THIS miracle stands in such close relation to the Feeding of the Five Thousand that it is not to be wondered at that many critics have tried to identify the two. But the points of difference are too numerous and striking to admit of this, as, for example, with regard to the number of persons fed, the quantity of the food, the amount of the fragments left over, the nature of the baskets used, and the time and place of the miracles, to say nothing of other and subtler traits which will appear in the course of the following exposition. Nor must it be forgotten that our Lord Himself clearly established the distinction between the two miracles when He asked His disciples, in the striking conversation that followed the second: "When I brake the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces took ye up? They say unto Him, Twelve. And when the seven among the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces took ye up? And they say unto Him, Seven"

(Mark viii. 19, 20). We may turn, then, to the miracle now before us, confident that in it we have a separate and no less striking proof of the Saviour's power than that which has already been considered.

From the preceding narrative it would appear that Jesus had been journeying through the midst of the borders of Decapolis (Mark vii. 31), attended by a crowd so great that it reminded the disciples of the crowds to which they had been accustomed on the western shores of the lake (Mark iii. 20 ; iv. 1 ; v. 21). And the sight, as always, stirred the Saviour's deepest feelings. "He called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude," or more exactly, "I yearn over the multitude with a yearning pity." In others, the presence of a great mass of their fellow-creatures might awaken a feeling of wonder, or of awe, or sometimes even of contempt. But in Jesus it produced only compassion (compare Matthew ix. 36 ; Mark vi. 34), a compassion deepened on this occasion by the fact that these people were suffering through their attendance upon Him. "They continue with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat." In the case of the five thousand apparently only one day had passed before their wants were miraculously supplied ; but in the present instance the stay had been of longer duration, and whatever supplies of provision the multitude had brought with them were now wholly exhausted. It was true that, unlike the five thousand, the Decapolitans were in their own country, and if dismissed would make their way home. But the towns and villages of that region were few and scattered. And

so, anticipating the proposal to send them away with which doubtless the Twelve were again ready (compare Mark vi. 36), Jesus expressed the fear that, if this were done, the people would "faint in the way" (Mark viii. 3).

We might naturally have expected that their previous experience of the Saviour's wonderful bounty would have led the disciples to look to the same source of help. But no! with a forgetfulness which would seem to us well-nigh impossible, were it not for our own constant unbelief, they replied, "Whence shall one be able to fill these men with bread here in a desert place?" (Mark viii. 4); but only to be met with the old rejoinder, "How many loaves have ye?" (verse 5). And no sooner had Jesus heard that there still remained seven along with a few of the small fishes, which in the East it was customary to take along with bread as a relish (Matthew xv. 34; Mark viii. 7), than, issuing His command directly, and not as formerly through the Twelve (John vi. 10), He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. There is no mention here—and the point though small is worth noticing, as an additional proof of the verisimilitude of the whole narrative—of the "green grass" (Mark vi. 39): "the spring was now past, and the hills were bare" (Swete).

And no sooner were the people seated than, taking the loaves first, to follow the account in St Mark, the Saviour gave thanks, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the people: and then similarly He blessed and distributed the fishes (viii. 6, 7). "And they did eat, and were filled." And not only so, but "they took up, of broken pieces that remained over,

seven baskets" (Mark viii. 8). Not the stout wicker baskets (κόφινοι) which were used on the occasion of the first miracle, but soft, flexible "frails" (σφυρίδες), which were often, however, of considerable size (compare Acts ix. 25, where Saul makes his escape in one).

The number of men thus ministered to was, as we have already seen, four thousand, as compared with the five thousand of the first miracle. And the numbers have been interpreted symbolically, as helping to establish that the multitude in the first instance was largely Jewish in origin, and in the second, composed chiefly of the semi-heathen inhabitants of Decapolis. It may well have been so in any case from the general surroundings of the two miracles, and they are in consequence sometimes found typical of the offer of Christ, the true Bread of Life, to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. But instead of following out a line of interpretation, which is very apt to become fanciful and unreal, it is safer to see with most modern expositors, in the duplication of the miracle, a proof, on the one hand, of the graciousness of the Saviour, who did not shrink from repeating a beneficent work, even on a lower level, out of regard to human necessity, and a solemn rebuke, on the other hand, to our own faithlessness in judging of the Lord's mercies.

Who does not know how fatally easy it is to forget with the Twelve, in the hour of present difficulty, the past deliverances which God has worked, or out of the old experience, "The Lord hath been mindful of us," to fail to draw the comforting conclusion, "He will bless us" (Psalm cxv. 12)? When we are so tempted,

let us remember that the same hand which ministered to the wants of the five thousand, was equally ready to minister to the wants of the four thousand, and that for a like human need there is always a corresponding divine supply.

THE OPENING OF THE EYES OF ONE BLIND AT BETHSAIDA

By the late Rev. HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D.

THE OPENING OF THE EYES OF ONE BLIND AT BETHSAIDA

"And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking."—MARK viii. 24.

OUR Lord knew well the pathos and loneliness of having no one to understand Him or to sympathise with Him. He had to say to all His disciples as He once said to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet have ye not known Me?" They had eyes only to see the hard surface of things; they had no insight into the profound meanings of His parables and miracles; they were insensible to the wonders of the eternal world in which He lived. And with all His teaching He could not bring them out of the spiritual darkness in which they were shrouded into His own marvellous light. It is, therefore, not without appropriate significance that the Evangelist should have been led to record a miracle wrought upon a blind man in immediate connection with our Lord's complaint regarding the mental obtuseness of the disciples, "How is it that ye do not understand?" The miracle of curing physical blindness seems as if it were intended as a sacrament or acted parable

illustrative of the curing of the darker blindness of the soul.

The way in which our Lord wrought this miracle was a wide departure from His usual method. Unlike the other miracles of the Gospels it was not immediate but progressive. It was not wrought at once and by a word, but gradually, and by the use of means. In the other cases of blindness, the miracle of restoration was like the act of the Creator, who said, "Let there be light, and there was light"; Jesus spoke the word to the darkened eye, and instantly it was opened to the light of day. But in the case before us, the cure was effected by a succession of steps, every one of which we can to a certain extent follow and understand. This miracle bears fewest of the signs of a miracle, and approximates most nearly in its mode of operation to the ordinary healing of a skilful physician. And we have every reason to believe that Jesus adopted this method as being the best adapted to the circumstances. He never observed one uniform and settled method of miracle-working; had He done so, the spirit of formalism and superstition which lies so deep in our nature would have seized upon that method, and linked it inseparably with His divine power, and we should have been led to believe that He had only one stereotyped mode of healing us, which, in consequence, would have become sacred. In this way we should have limited His power and grace. But He varied His procedure so as to prevent us from attaching undue value to the form, and letting go the substance. Over and above this reason, He departed in this instance from His usual method of cure, because He wished to deal

specially, according to their necessities, with the persons affected—with the friends who brought the blind man to Him, and with the blind man himself.

We are told that the friends of the blind man who brought him to Jesus besought Him to touch him. That in itself was an indication of a wrong state of mind in which to expect a miracle. They dictated to Jesus how He was to cure the blind man. They expected it could be only in a certain way. Like Naaman, the Syrian leper, in regard to Elisha, they looked upon Jesus as a great magician who would employ the prescribed cabalistic method—"Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." The friends of the blind man thought that Jesus had only to touch him in a particular way, to lay His hands by some occult hypnotism upon his sightless orbs, and he would without any further trouble be made to see. But just as Elisha told Naaman that he was to be cured by simply going and washing in the Jordon seven times, so Jesus acted in regard to the blind man. Instead of doing what the friends and the blind man expected, and pandering to their superstitious notions, and confirming their credulous prejudices, which connected the cure with a certain kind of magical manipulation on the part of the curer, He wrought the miracle in the simplest and most natural-looking way, so that it might have the least appearance of being a supernatural wonder, appealing to their astonishment and awe.

And what could have been better fitted for the instruction and illumination of the blind man's own soul,

than this unostentatious gradual manner of the miracle? Let us imagine, as we may well do, that he was hard to be convinced, while at the same time easily imposed upon, requiring repeated efforts to be made and a varied instrumentality to be employed, ere he yielded to the power of the truth. How appropriate to such a condition was the slowness and apparent difficulty of the way in which he was healed. Jesus took him aside from the crowd, to some lonely spot in the neighbourhood of the town, away from all the hindering influences of his surroundings, that face to face with Himself, with no other being intervening, the very isolation might concentrate his thoughts upon his cure and his Healer. Then Jesus applied His own saliva to his eyes—gave a part of Himself in the cure, for that is the meaning of this strange action. How unlike it was to the first creation of the eye out of the dust, by a word, costing nothing! In this new creation, redeeming the eye from the evil which sin had caused, He needed to sacrifice Himself. He opened the blind physical eye with His saliva; He gives light to the dark soul by His sweat and His blood. How different was the way of Christ in this miracle from the magician's manner, in which, without any trouble to himself, the friends of the blind man thought he was to be cured. This kind cometh only by fasting and prayer, by toil, and loss, and suffering. Jesus put His hands upon the blind man in token of His sympathy, of His desire to enter into closest fellowship with him, and was afflicted in his affliction—the only condition upon which any true healing can be done. And then the question if he saw anything, and the reply of the man that he saw

men as trees walking, and finally the putting again of His hands upon the man's eyes, followed by his complete recovery—all this lengthening out of the miracle was like the lengthening out of a shut telescope, enabling the man to adjust the true focus to his sight, and see more clearly. It was fitted to make a deep and abiding impression upon him, such as could have been produced in no other way. Whatever ignorance, or unbelief, or superstition was in him slowly gave way before the gradual enlightening effect of the miracle upon his mind. His soul cleared of all its films and mists of sin, as his eyes cleared of all the natural obscurations of his eyesight; and the hour of his translation out of darkness into the light of day, was the hour of his translation out of the deeper darkness of the soul into the more marvellous light of the knowledge of God, in the face of Jesus Christ His Son.

And when for the first time the blind eyes were opened, what a wonderful sight revealed itself to him! There were the shining waters of the sea of Galilee stretching before him, bounded on the opposite side by the opal hills of Gadara, and mirroring on their calm surface the snowy crest of Hermon, which bore the wide fair landscape in its arms far up to the blue dome of the sky for the blessing of heaven. It was a sight like that which St John saw in Patmos, when the door was opened in heaven, and he looked through upon the sea of glass and the great white throne. It was a sight like that which rushes upon the saint, when his mortal eyes have been couched by death, and the heavenly eye-salve has anointed them to behold the glories of the eternal world. And

grander, dearer than all, there, beside the newly restored man, were the form and the face that were fairer than those of the sons of men, no longer seeming like a tree walking, but separated from the creation; not a creature, but the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His Person. What a sublime moment was that, to behold earth in its beauty and heaven in its glory at a single glance, to gaze at the natural sun, and to behold Him who is the light of the world—the true light that lighteneth every man, in whom all the new hopes of his quickened soul were concentrated.

My text brings before us in a most striking way the unique peculiarity of the miracle, which marks it off from all others. It stops half-way to show us the progress and the method of the cure. The miracle is interrupted, as it were, at an intermediate stage, in order that we may see into its heart of meaning and be able to realise its full significance. Jesus asked the half-cured man if he saw aught. He looked up and said that "he saw men as trees walking." There was a blurred, luminous tumult of sight rushing into his eyes, mixed with dim shadows, like objects looming through a mist, changing their shapes as they moved, so that he could not distinguish what they were. The true focus of vision was not yet attained. This vague consciousness of returning sight would be like the first light of dawn stealing over the earth, and touching by its beams the various objects of the landscape, struggling with the darkness of the night in a monstrous medley of confusion. The gradual process of the miracle is in remarkable accordance with the way in which

sight is naturally acquired, and stamps the narrative with the watermark of truth. We naturally imagine that vision is acquired at once; that we have only to open our eyes, and to see at a glance everything in its proper form and size and colour and distance. The ancients all had this idea. When Mark wrote his Gospel, and for seventeen hundred years afterwards, it was never dreamt that the eye itself did not from the very beginning judge of figures, magnitudes, situations, and distances. It was reserved for our modern philosophers and physiologists to find out that it is only gradually the eye learns to judge of the outlines of things, how far distant anything is from us, and how large or small any object is. This knowledge is acquired in earliest infancy in a way so gradual and unmarked that we are unconscious of it. What appears now in mature life to be entirely supplied by sight, a natural endowment of the eye, has been given in a great measure by the sense of touch. Our clear and distinct perception instantaneously of the figures of objects, and of their size and relation to one another, has been gained progressively by the combined exercise of sight and touch. And this is shown in a remarkable manner by the coincidence between our Saviour touching the eyes of the blind man, and his acquiring the power of vision by the combined action of the light of the sun and the hand of man. This coincidence between touch and sight in the power of vision, was altogether unknown when Mark related the miracle; and its discovery in far later years is a striking proof that our Lord wrought His miracle, not in contradiction to the law of nature, but in the

line of it. It therefore confirms in an unexpected way, like a watermark in the narrative, the verisimilitude of the incident.

Now the revelation of the slow, successive steps of imparting the power of vision to the blind man in the miracle of our Lord, contains a much-needed lesson for our day. We are apt to think that this miracle is less wonderful than other miracles because it was done gradually, and we see the various steps of the process. If the eyes of the blind man had been opened immediately by a word from God, we should consider it as a mere act of sovereign will, and acquiesce in it at once. All reasoning would have been laid aside, and the mind would repose at once on the boundless resources of Almighty power. But when second causes and intermediate instruments are employed, of whose efficiency for the purpose we ourselves can judge, it is a far greater strain upon our faith to attribute the whole carrying out of the process to God. The work seems to be a common work of healing instead of a divine miracle of grace. And so we are apt to think that the wonders of creation are less due to a great First Cause, because science has enabled us to trace the ways in which these wonders have been brought about. We seem to lose sight of the Creator Himself, the more clearly we understand the natural causes, and the methods of the work of His hands. If we can explain how a thing came about, we seem to ourselves to have taken all the mystery, all the divine agency, out of it. It seems as if it came about of its own accord, by natural causes, and needed no divine agency. It was far

easier for our forefathers to believe in the working of God in nature than it is for us, because almost everything in nature was unknown to them. The world was full of mysteries which they could not explain; and therefore it was natural for them to attribute all that they could not explain to a supernatural power. But our age has investigated the secrets of nature. Almost every part of the natural system has been explored. The light of physical science has dispelled the darkness that surrounded the forms and forces of the world. We have by our microscopes gone down to the hidden sources of things; and by our telescopes and spectroscopes we have searched the heavens, and examined the materials of the remotest stars. And science having thus exhausted, so far, the mystery of the universe, our very familiarity with its agencies, and the ease with which we can trace and explain the links that unite all parts of nature, seem to exclude God and to make Him unnecessary. If we saw the universe springing into existence by an Almighty word, then we would not doubt the existence and power of God; but when we see the universe upheld day by day by an unseen Providence working by natural means which we ourselves can search and find out, then God seems to recede into the unknown, and to be as if He were not, and all things appear to manage themselves by their own inherent power.

But the ultimate design of such a miracle as that which we are considering is to remove that false impression. It shows to us the Son of God, who made all things, working by means which we can in some measure understand, but as surely bringing

about His great ends by these means as if He merely spoke the word and it was done, commanded and it stood fast. The divine power of our Saviour is seen through all the means of the miracle, as surely as the touch of the spider is felt to the extremities of all the threads of its web. God is not lost among His works; He is holding all the reins of nature as truly as if we saw them visibly in His hands. It is not with the theories of science that we quarrel, with the theory of evolution, for instance, which seeks to prove that not immediately, but by a long process of gradually improving forms, man and all life spring from the dust; for if that theory is true, it only reveals to us the methods of God's working, and all that we require is that it should be substantiated. No, our quarrel is with the Godlessness of these theories in so far as they seek to eliminate God altogether from His works, and to prove that nature is quite sufficient to carry on the development process itself. Science regards itself as the only miracle worker of the world, the only power that opens the eyes of the blind; and Revelation is brushed impatiently aside as a relic of the dark ages of ignorance. But a Godless science, like Argus who had a hundred eyes and yet could not see, is a blind science. It is groping in the dark. It is sitting blind by the wayside, begging, and crying out, "Who will show us any good?" At the best its knowledge has only enabled it to see men as trees walking—a superior species of trees, gifted with a new power of locomotion, and flowering into heart and brain, instead of blossoms and fruit. It confounds cause and effect, matter and life, in the dim shadows that have distorted its imperfect vision. It merges

man in the creation and makes him a mere part of nature, subject to its laws and destinies, a mere cameo carved out of the substance of nature instead of a God-like statue, standing upon nature as its pedestal. And science must wait until its eyes are opened by Him who has the key which unlocks all the treasures, all the deepest things of the material and spiritual world.

And is not the gradual way in which Jesus wrought the cure of the blind man still an acted parable of the gradual way in which He opens the eyes of the soul to see the things which belong to its peace? That mode of cure which our Lord employed in this unique instance in the course of the bodily healing which He wrought on earth, is the type of the common and usual method of the cure of our spiritual blindness. Christ hardly ever gives at once the full power of perception. It is but very slowly and gradually that the lost vision is restored, that the inward eye realises the true discernment of spiritual things. How many are taken by the hand of Jesus, and led apart from the crowds of life, and in the seclusion of the soul with Him experience His first miraculous touch, and feel the strange thrill through their being which is the token that He is beginning the good work by which their soul's vision is to be restored? How many are there who reply to the question of Jesus, "Do you now see?" "We see men as trees walking"? And how many are there, who are content to remain in that condition, satisfied with a half cure, mistaking the half of religion for the whole? How little they know of Christ, of themselves, of their fellow-Christians, of the ways of God! An eye completely

open, even in regard to common things, is a rare experience. Most persons see through mists which assume the colours of prejudice or passion, and it is but a vague, dim outline of things which meets the sight. And the cases are still rarer of the clear open eye in the higher sphere of the soul. Most Christians walk with half-closed eyes in a vain show, seeing men as trees walking.

It is a vestige of this half cure of spiritual blindness that brings the evangelical Christian so often into perilous contention with the scientific sceptic. The scientist sees no God, because he thinks he can explain in a natural way all the means and methods of creation. The evangelical Christian acts in a parallel way, for he sees no God in the scientist's natural explanation of these means and methods, and because the theory of evolution makes the miracle of creation appear slow and gradual instead of instantaneous, and because it reveals the steps of the process, therefore he thinks it excludes God and cannot be true. Both thus strangely enough agree in thinking that when a thing is explained, and its course traced, all the divinity is taken out of it. Whereas the real question is—Can the theory be established by facts which cannot be gainsaid? If so, all that the Christian and the scientist alike can conclude is, that so far from excluding God, it is only a truer revelation of God. They have both humbly to confess, "This is God's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. This is God's method of working, and we knew it not; our eyes were holden so that we could not see."

Such purblind Christians need another touch of Jesus' hands. Some pious self-righteous souls that

we know, need a great many touches continually applied, before the cure is perfected. It needs a long and painstaking and trying education to train the inward eye, and purge it of all the films of sense and sin, so that it may see light clearly. But let us, throughout the many stages and mortifying discoveries of our prolonged cure, ever come to our Saviour who is passing by, and who counsels us to buy of Him eye-salve that we may see, and He will anoint us and so restore to the inward eye its power and teach us how to use it. Let the prayer of our life be "Lord, that our eyes may be opened, and that we may have power to keep them open, that we may see all that Thou hast to show us, rejoicing in the vision; an eye clear enough to see the good part, and a heart wise enough to choose it, the singleness of eye that makes the whole body and the whole life full of light."

THE DEMONIAC

By Rev. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

THE DEMONIAC

The Saving Power of Hands

"But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose."—MARK ix. 27.

THEY had all said that this boy or young man was hopelessly diseased and desperately mad; past healing; beyond all that man could do to help him—nay, well-nigh beyond the help of the Almighty, so far as this life was concerned. They were all of one mind about that. The scribes and Pharisees with their hard hearts and unfeeling hearts ridiculed the idea of doing anything for him, and asked, indeed, why any solicitude should be wasted on such a worthless object. The crowd of common people pitied the poor, suffering lad as the crowd always does, but what could be done! Alas, nothing! His very father who would have laid down life to save him, stood crying and wringing his hands in desperate impotence, and confessing that the case was beyond remedy. The disciples had endeavoured to heal him, and failed so completely that the bystanders were laughing at them. They had done their best. They had prayed for him, they had talked to him, they had invoked the evil spirit by all

the mighty and holy names they knew to come out. They had done everything they could. No, there was one thing which they had either never thought of, or which they had shrunk from doing. They had not touched the boy. He was indeed not an inviting object to behold; the look of madness was in his eyes, the white foam about his mouth, his clothes were torn and thickly coated with the dirt in which he had rolled. His face and hands were one mass of blotches and filth from his wallowing in the mud. He was not an object which dainty hands would be eager to lay hold of; and the disciples had drawn the line there. Perhaps if they had added that sympathetic touch to their prayers and invocations, even they might have succeeded.

It is possible that we might do mighty works if we were not so dreadfully afraid to touch people.

Then, when all things seemed at the blackest for that father and his boy, Jesus came, and with a few strong, cheery words about hope and faith, brought gleams of morning into the night. There was no shrinking there. Christ's hands were as delicately clean and sensitive as the finest lady's hands. But the Saviour of the world was never afraid of touching men. Why should He? They were His own flesh and blood. He touched the most repulsive and loathsome human creatures as readily as you would kiss your own child. While that boy lay like one dead, Christ stooped down, took him by the hand, and lifted him up, and he arose, healed and in his right mind. Christ's miracle-working power had driven out the unclean spirit; but it was the grasp of that strong gentle hand that set the lad on his feet and completed

the work. And thereby comes a lesson for us. Ay, perhaps more than one lesson, for that pressure and holding of the hand is symbolic of many things. Let me try to speak to you of some of them.

Jesus took him by the hand. That is the dry fact; you can understand that at once. But the manner of it! you cannot so easily understand that. It was the way in which Jesus did everything that made His actions so beautiful. There are a thousand ways of taking a man's hand, and one way is as sweet and solemn as a sacrament, and another way is as hard and offensive as the touch of cold steel. What we call handshaking is a study in character. A man expresses all that is in his heart by that action, and if he has no heart at all, you discover it in a moment when his hand touches yours. When some people give you their hands, you feel as if you were holding a jelly-fish, cold and flabby, and it is quite a relief to let them go; and some hands are given to you in the shape of two finger-tips, as if to give you more would encourage you to be too familiar; and some hands are offered to you with a shivering nervousness, as if their owners were apologising for taking the liberty; and some are held out with a condescending patronage, which makes every bit of pride within you writhe and rebel; and some grip you like a vice, half crushing your bones, not to show how much they love you but to show how strong they are; and some shake hands so swiftly and lightly that they are away and out of your sight before you know what they have done. There is nothing more delightful than the grasp of a man's hand when a heart full of love

goes with it; and nothing more offensive than the handshake which is purely formal, ceremonious, and without feeling. I do not want a stiff hand held out to me and to all comers alike, when I enter or leave a sanctuary, by some minister or deacon who does it as if he was ticking off figures. I resent it, because it is machine-like or patronising. But a hand that quivers with real feeling as it touches mine, and has something in it of the magnetism of love! that lifts me up and sets me on my feet and gives me a bit of self-respect, and a breezy something in my heart which lasts all the day.

Now think of all there was in that action of Jesus. He took him by the hand. Ah, what a hand-shaking was that. It was the whole hand, you may be sure, no finger-tips; and the muscles that strengthened the grip were firm as iron though the pressure was so gentle. And it was as warm as love could make it. It was thrilling with tenderness, and vibrating with compassion. The beating of a divine heart was in all its pulses. It was soft as a mother's, and mighty as a giant's. There was not the least shrinking in it, or the faintest touch of condescension. It was so sweet, so pitiful, so powerful, that the boy felt new life coming into him. If you could learn to hold men's hands like that, you could well-nigh work miracles.

If Jesus were here now, it is just such a hand-shaking that He would give some of you, some of you who came into the sanctuary to-night with a feeling that you were absolute strangers here, and with almost a certainty that you would go away unnoticed; some, perhaps, who crept into the sanctuary

half-ashamed, feeling that it was no place for such a lump of sin, sickness, and guilt as they brought with them; some that for years have never felt the hearty grip of a good man's hand, and hardly dare take one because their own hands have been so steeped in sin; and some so poor and desolate and lonely that they think no one in the world cares for them. If Jesus were here, I know that He would go first to them. And His hands would meet theirs with such a pressure of love and welcome as they have never felt in their lives, not even from their own mothers. Nay, He *is* here, though you see Him not; and the grasp of His invisible love is upon you, though you do not feel it. The Church may be cold, but the Master of the Church is never cold. The saints may be too respectable to speak to you, but He whom the saints worship has His mouth close enough to kiss you. There is no ceremony or patronage with Him. He meets you as a brother, though He is Almighty God. Though you are far viler than you deem yourselves, He will not draw back from you one hair's-breadth. He is made up, not of disdain and repulsions, but of gentle touches and winning embraces. Though you were the most loathsome sinner that ever breathed, He would take you by the hand and lift you up.

He took him by the hand. There is a wonderful saving power in that if we would only use it. We could do Christ's work with many a one; we could bring Christ's redeeming grace to many a one if we had only courage enough, and pitying love enough, to follow His example in this. There is many a soul

saved by the Gospel which flows through the hands, who cannot be saved by the Gospel which is preached through the lips. Words, however beautiful and impressive, however tearful and thrilling, are not like the grasp of honest, tender hands, which tell a man that you still think of him as a brother man, and are not ashamed to touch him. If he is very low down, the first thing he needs is to have the least bit of self-respect infused into him, and some faint glimmering of hope. He needs to be taught first that he is not utterly despised and despicable, and that somebody really cares for him. And nothing will convince him of that but a kindly grip of the hand. You may tell him a thousand times that Jesus loves him, but you will not make him believe it unless he feels that there is a bit of love in you. Take his hand! That will be the proof that he wants. Hold his hand with a bit of genuine warmth, as you hold the hand of your child. There is a mighty, attractive force in that hand of yours if you use it in a right way. It will lift up many a degraded sinner who, without that, would in all probability never rise at all.

There is a wide sphere of usefulness provided by every church and congregation for what I may call the Gospel of the hands—of course if your hands are cold, stiff, and formal, I have not the slightest wish that you should use them at all. They are only fit to wear gloves or play mechanical tunes on pianos. If they stroked a dog, it would only make the dog snarl. For even a dog knows the difference between unfeeling hands and hands that are alive with sensitive nerves of love. But if you have what I call live hands, what grand room for your activities there is in the sanc-

tuary. Take somebody by the hand. There are scores of people there needing that very thing, longing for it; scores of people to whom it might mean almost salvation. There are strangers coming here every Sunday beseeching with their lonely looks for a welcome, wistfully longing to find in God's house something that will make them feel at home. I know there is a difference in people, some come and go away without the least wish to be approached, ready even to resent a friendly word, but not many. Keep your eyes open and your hearts open, and you will always know when a true pressure of the hand would be as sweet as a Gospel.

And some are sorrowful! O how heavy they are when they come in, too grieved in spirit to take in the words of the preacher. Though those words are brimful of comforting promises. For these there is something magnetic, nay, there is the healing of a sacrament in a kindly touch. Look out for some of these sad ones, and take them by the hand. And there are dozens of people here, and in every congregation, young and old, but especially young, who are hovering on the brink of religious decision. Their backs are half turned on the service of the world, their faces are inclined towards Christ. It needs only one gentle push of love to send them forward towards the blessed life. A grasp of the hand and an earnest, friendly word would do it. Nay, it would do it with many of those who have hardly begun to think religiously at all. It would set them thinking. It would make them feel and say, "Well, really, that good man, that sweet-faced woman, is anxious about me, cares for me." That is the beginning of better things

in many a life. The sermon never goes more than half way. It wants carrying forward and backing up. In hundreds of cases it is lost altogether for want of that. The good seed perishing of cold because there is no warmth of love about to nurse and keep it alive. Take these people by the hand and lift them up.

Think of the young men and women in nearly every congregation who have come up to town to live, well-nigh friendless there. Think how lonely they are in their apartments; all the dear faces absent which they have known and loved, father and mother praying for them in some village home long miles away; but no home for *them* among strangers. Think of their temptations. Think what you would feel if your own boys and girls were placed like that, and how your hearts would overflow with gratitude if you heard that some of Christ's people had shown them kindness and taken them by the hand. As you would that men should do to your sons and daughters, so do you to theirs. There are many of you always complaining that there is no Christian work which you can do, or which you are fit for. Well, if there is nothing else to be done, you can do this. And I do not believe that there can be any Christian work more Christ-like, for it was what Jesus Himself was always doing. He took people by the hand and lifted them up.

THE COIN IN THE FISH'S MOUTH

By Rev. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.

THE COIN IN THE FISH'S MOUTH

MATTHEW xvii. 24-27.

THIS miracle, which is narrated only by St Matthew, occupies a position by itself amongst our Lord's miracles. There is no other miracle exactly like it, and it is hardly to be wondered at that some even of those commentators who unhesitatingly admit the presence of the miraculous in the New Testament think that in this case some essential particular may have been omitted or left unexplained. And yet, as we hope to show, the incident, taken as a whole, is full both of doctrinal and ethical significance, a significance so great, that in drawing attention to it the narrator lays hardly any stress on the miraculous part of the story.

After the healing of the lunatic child somewhere in the neighbourhood of Cæsarea-Philippi, the Lord passed through Galilee, avoiding as far as possible public attention, and devoting Himself to the instruction of His disciples (Mark ix. 31). And little though they understood Him, the belief that in some mysterious way He was about to establish His Messianic

kingdom would seem to have taken possession of their thoughts, and led to disputes who amongst them would occupy the principal places in it (Mark ix. 33, 34). Of these disputes Jesus took no notice at the time, but from St Matthew it would seem that the incident before us had some bearing on them, as he represents the disciples coming immediately afterwards to their Master with the question, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (compare xviii. 1). The point will come up again. In the meantime we must notice the exact nature of the incident itself.

In the course of their journeyings Jesus and His disciples had reached Capernaum, where, in Peter's house the Saviour had found a temporary home. And no sooner was their arrival known than Peter was waited upon by certain tax-collectors with the question, "Doth not your Master pay the half-shekel?"

Much confusion has been caused by the idea that the reference here is to some civil impost which the Lord was owing to the Roman government, like the *denarius* that is afterwards spoken of (Matthew xxii. 19). And the idea is encouraged by the erroneous translation "tribute" in our Authorised Version. But the word actually employed is *didrachma*, or "half-shekel," and there can be no doubt that it is a religious and national, and not a civil, payment that is pointed to. From time immemorial every Israelite above twenty years of age had been in the habit of paying into the treasury of the tabernacle, and afterwards of the temple, "half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary" as "a ransom for his soul unto the Lord" (see Exodus

xxx. 11-16). And though at first this sum was payable only on the comparatively rare occasions of the numbering of the people, after the Babylonian captivity it was made annual. According to the Rabbis, the usual time for collecting this tax was between the 15th and 25th Adar, or about the time of the Jewish Passover. But there would seem to have been considerable laxity with regard to this, especially in the case of the Jews living at a distance from Palestine. And indeed the whole tax was so largely of a patriotic and (therefore partially at least) a voluntary character, that in the time of our Lord no very severe methods for enforcing it would seem to have prevailed. We might almost gather as much, indeed, from the civil terms of the collectors' question to Peter on the present occasion, so unlike the rude and overbearing demands of the Roman *publicani*, even if it be not further the case that Jewish Rabbis or Teachers were, as a rule, exempted from the tax altogether. If so, all that the collectors might mean would be, "Is your Master, your Teacher, in the habit of paying this due or is He not?"

On the other hand, and Peter's emphatic answer in the affirmative rather favours this view, it is by no means improbable that, during the early period of His life, Jesus with that marvellous condescension to the earthly surroundings of His lot which ever distinguished Him, had paid the tax. But that now, in view of the new claims He had been putting forth, and above all of the emphatic assertion of His Messiahship to which Peter had just given utterance (Matt. xvi. 16), such condescension was no longer possible, at any rate without full explanation of its reason.

And, accordingly, no sooner had they come into the house than Jesus, anticipating any question which His disciples might put to Him on the matter, asked, "What thinkest thou, Simon? the kings of the earth from whom do they receive toll or tribute? from their sons or from strangers?" There could be but one answer, "From strangers." And no sooner had Jesus received this admission from Peter than at once He pressed home the inevitable conclusion, "Therefore the sons are free." Or to apply the parable. If, in the case of earthly rule, the sons of royalty from their very position go untaxed, how much more does this apply in the case of the only-begotten Son of the King of Heaven? Surely Peter cannot have forgotten his own great confession. Or how can he imagine that "the Christ, the Son of the living God," who has come to redeem all souls by the ransom of His own life, shall be required to pay this money-ransom for His own?

But, as Jesus went on to show, there were many occasions when what was not obligatory might be expedient. And He who had already veiled His divine glory by coming in human form was ready now to give further proof of His humility and self-effacement by paying this tax for the sake of others. "But, lest we cause them to stumble"—lest we put any difficulty in the way of those who are not yet prepared to admit My full claims—"go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a shekel: that take, and give unto them for Me and thee." It was a marvellous act of submission when we think of Him who made it, and better than any more

direct rebuke should have shown the disciples how vain and wrong their own selfish pretensions were. How could there be any talk of greatest or least in a kingdom, the rule of whose Head was that He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Matthew xx. 28).

And yet in the very act of submission, as Bengel finely remarks, Christ's majesty gleams forth. For in paying the tax He pays it in such a way that the disciples' sense of His power and glory is heightened rather than diminished. There is no need of making the miracle more difficult than it is already by supposing that the shekel, or *stater*, was actually *created* for the occasion. As a matter of fact Christ seems never to have absolutely created anything, least of all for His own benefit, and many instances can be adduced of fish swallowing coins or other glittering objects accidentally dropped into the water. The miraculous element in the occurrence lay rather in the foreknowledge on the Lord's part that the first fish that came to Peter's hook would carry this coin in its mouth.

But, as has already been remarked, it is this part of the story that bulks least in the Evangelist's thoughts. He never even tells us that the miracle actually happened, but leaves us to take it for granted, while he recounts the conversation out of which it grew, and implies in consequence the lessons it was so well fitted to teach.

It is unnecessary to draw out these lessons at length again. But if our exposition has been correct, we may sum them up by saying that we are brought here into the presence of a Redeemer wholly divine

and yet wholly human, a Son in His Father's house, and therefore not subject to any earthly laws, and yet a Son so full of grace and compassion that He is willing in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He may by all means win all.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

Christ Raising Lazarus

By the Very Rev. PRINCIPAL ALEXANDER STEWART, D.D.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

Christ Raising Lazarus

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."—John xi. 25, 26.

"Life and immortality"—such, according to the Apostle, was the precious possession brought to light by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was thus that the Gospel met human nature at the point where human nature was weakest, and cast its own blessed light upon the path when it was darkest. In this lay the secret of its success. For while men might not all be conscious of sin, might not perceive their need of pardon or of moral strength, they were all painfully conscious of the vanity of life, of its oppressive cares and fleeting joys, of the dark shadow which surrounded it as it lay "between a sleep and a sleep." As one after another dropped from their side in life's race, they perceived but too clearly how the all-devouring grave waited for them also, how youth and strength were no security against death's ravages, and as they

peered into the abyss into whose depths no light was cast, from which no voice came back, they found but cold comfort in the conjectures and theories of the philosophers, and but a desperate satisfaction in the pleasures of sense, by which they sought to make the most of the present time. God and immortality are two truths which we see to be most closely related; but as a practical need it may be questioned whether the second does not stand nearer to the average human heart than the first—that men believe in God because they must believe in immortality, rather than believe in immortality because they believe in God. So long as the sun of prosperity shines upon them at least, they are apt to think they need nothing further, yet none can resist a tremor at the thought of what the future may unfold. A religion, therefore, which claimed to penetrate the veil, to bring near to faith, if not yet to sight, the eternal world, had an irresistible attraction. It was when Peter declared "that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ," that the people were pricked in their heart. It was St Paul's first solemn message to the Christians of Rome, that Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." And these utterances of His Apostles were but the echoes of Christ's own testimony concerning Himself—"I am the resurrection and the life."

They are sweet and solemn words; they sound like music in our ears—like noble and familiar music, full of sad and tender association. For we have perhaps heard them in our hour of sorrow, when the hand that was wont to press ours in love and friend-

ship was cold and still, and the voice whose accents had been so dear to us had but just passed into the eternal silence. What a feeling these words brought to us then as of a presence which death could not conquer, of a strength which vanquished the grave, of a yearning love and pity which could more than any other in all the world heal the wound and wipe away the tear.

It was in such a season of affliction that they were first used. How impressive is the narrative which this chapter contains! If the whole fourth Gospel has been justly termed a prose poem upon the theme, "The Word was made flesh," as truly may this chapter be called a poem, a drama circling round the thought, "I am the resurrection and the life." With the exception of the last hours of Jesus Himself, the Gospels do not present such another episode so minutely described, so perfect in its climax, so thrilling in its every detail. With the unstudied simplicity, the perfect art of perfect truthfulness, scene follows scene, the action unfolds itself from point to point. And we feel it not less because we know that here we are but in the antechamber to the great agony, that upon Him who thus rescues its prey from the jaws of death, the shadow of the Cross is already falling—nay, that His is the heroism of friendship, for in turning back the tide of sorrow for His friends at Bethany, He gave the signal which brought His enemies around Him and sealed His own doom. In a true sense He gave His life for the life of His friend.

In the unsettled regions beyond the Jordan Jesus had been comparatively safe. His foes "sought to

take Him; but He escaped out of their hand." From this retreat He was summoned by a cry for help. Lazarus of Bethany was sick; and he and his sisters, Martha and Mary, stood to Jesus in a relation of closer intimacy than He appears to have had with any others outside the circle of His disciples; their house was the nearest approach to a home which He had known since He entered upon His ministry. Very touching in its humility and trustfulness was the message sent by the sisters of Lazarus, "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." They do not say what they themselves would have, they state the fact, and leave the rest to His loving judgment.

From a comparison of the notes of time—since Lazarus had been four days dead when Jesus arrived at Bethany—it is probable that death had already supervened when the message reached Jesus. But as on His way to raise the daughter of Jairus He said, "The maid is not dead, but sleepeth," so, in view of all that was to be, He said of Lazarus, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." Thus, also, when after two days, He proposed to His disciples to go again into Judæa, He said unto them, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." Only when the dull understanding of the disciples took His words too literally, did He tell them plainly, "Lazarus is dead." And He points to the root of good that may be found if we seek it in every earthly misfortune, the blessing that may spring out of sorrow; while Himself grieving for His friend, while sympathising with the sorrow of the darkened home, He could

say to His disciples, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." Had He been there, the tide of life had not in all probability ebbed so far; "Hadst Thou been here," was the foremost thought in the mind of each of the sisters, "my brother had not died." He did not, as we have just seen, purposely delay that the sickness might terminate in death; the end had in all probability come while the messenger was on the way. He bowed to the providence of God, which would thus prepare the minds of the disciples for the great trial which they were shortly to undergo. Too late to ward off death, He delayed that the significance of the resurrection might be more apparent. The words of the sisters we must also read rather as a regret than a reproach, since they would know that the message they had sent Him could hardly have reached Him in time.

Jesus, doubtless from motives of prudence, remained outside the town. His was the true courage which shrank from no danger, but courted none. There Martha met Him, there Mary came to Him, both, as we have learned, with the same thought in their hearts. Martha entertains a hope to which she almost fears to give expression; Mary, more absorbed in grief, or more humble in her faith, does not even hint at it. The latter is attended by the neighbours and friends whom sympathy had drawn to the house of mourning. It was a moving scene, and one of which He, who is not untouched with the feeling of our infirmities, felt the full pathos. As they turned to go to the tomb, "Jesus wept." Some of those who were present, as they beheld the streaming

tears, saw in them a token of a friendship more sacred than their own. While others, with the sneer of scepticism, with an animosity which even that scene of sorrow could not hold in check, called to remembrance the miracle which had caused the enmity that sought His life, and asked, "Could not this man who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" Most unexpected was the answer to that hostile question. The sepulchre was a cave cut in the rock. Jesus ordered the stone which closed its entrance to be removed. He uttered a thanksgiving to the Father for the power He was about to exert. "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."

Such events are a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. They either bear down opposition or intensify it; they either conciliate friendship, or inflame with hatred. Some of the wondering spectators believed, while others went away to mature their dark and hostile plots. And what of the overjoyed sisters, who had now the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness? And what of him who for four days had been brought nigh to the dark secrets of the grave—what were his thoughts, what his words? Tradition tells us that for thirty years the life thus given back was prolonged sufficient to see the Church of Christ rise as an institution upon the basis of the Lord's own resurrection. But as

during the life of Jesus, so after His departure from the world, the life of Lazarus was one of quietness and obscurity, not unfaithful, not, we may well believe, unfruitful. The circumstances, however, which would have made him the centre of a wondering curiosity, made it impossible for him to assume a position of prominence. The miracle itself, important as it was, was probably left unrecorded until the members of that little circle had passed away.

"When Lazarus left his charnel-cave,
And home to Mary's house return'd,
Was this demanded—if he yearn'd
To hear her weeping by his grave?

"'Where wert thou, brother, those four days?'
There lives no record of reply
Which, telling what it is to die,
Had surely added praise to praise.

"From every house the neighbours met,
The streets were filled with joyful sound.
A solemn gladness even crown'd
The purple brows of Olivet.

"Behold a man raised up by Christ!
The rest remaineth unreveal'd;
He told it not; or something seal'd
The lips of that Evangelist."

Our Lord, in whatever circumstances He might be placed, was never unmindful of the work which the Father had given Him to do; while He ministered with unwearied diligence and devotion to the bodily needs of men, He never left out of view their higher interests; moved as He was by every pang that rends the heart, sympathising with human grief and

desolation wherever He met with it, He never forgot its relation to another and a deeper need. He was also ever unwilling to perform a wonder for the wonder's sake, or to satisfy a merely earthly yearning. He desired, along with the visible and temporary relief, to bestow a spiritual and heavenly blessing. Occasionally this double purpose produces upon us an effect not altogether welcome. We feel so keenly the lower need, that the intrusion of the other appears out of place. When the nobleman of Capernaum entreats His help for his sick child, Jesus meets him with the remark, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe." So in the narrative before us, Jesus, when He met Martha on the outskirts of Bethany, was not unwilling to turn the sorrow before Him into rejoicing by an act transcending her utmost expectation; but He was anxious that the present earthly benefit should be the means of raising her thoughts to a higher spiritual truth. He must prepare her for reading in the miracle He was about to perform, the lessons it was fitted to convey. Simply to restore her dead brother to her sight and love would have been an act of kindness indeed, but the very intensity of the joy occasioned by it might have diverted attention from its loftier aspect. But this was the side of it He was most anxious to impress. The one benefit a few years would exhaust, the other was a treasure bestowed for eternity.

The conversation of Jesus with Martha will be read a little differently, according as we suppose Martha to have had a secret thought regarding the possibility of a miraculous restoration, or not. Both views may be maintained. In the one case, Jesus would be pre-

paring her for the miracle; in the other, to look beyond the miracle to the truth it illustrated. It appears to me that her words in the 22nd verse, "But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee," imply a suggestion on her part, that He should exert His power on their behalf, just as at the marriage feast at Cana, He evidently considered His mother's saying to Him, "They have no wine," as an invitation to supply the deficiency by miracle. Martha had heard that elsewhere He had raised the dead; she had received His message in regard to her brother, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God," and though she feared to put her whole desire into words, she evidently cherished a hope. "Jesus said unto her, Thy brother shall rise again," but this, though it must have made her heart bound, was not explicit enough, it might only refer to the general resurrection. So, afraid of presuming, but eager still, she tries to get a more definite reply—"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day"—and if the answer is not precisely what she looked for, it seems to contain a fulness of promise, to enfold her in the strengthening and sustaining arms of a divine comfort—it is one of the golden words of Scripture, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me should never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord, I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." She asked no more; her doubts were silenced, her fears allayed; she felt that all things were in the hands of One

whose love and wisdom were unbounded, and though her faith did not at once rise to the full grandeur and expansion of the revelation He had made to her, it is seen groping after it, holding fast to the truth it had, reaching forth to that it desired to attain, in the very act, as it were, of *growing* into the knowledge of God and of His Son Jesus Christ.

"I am the resurrection and the life"—"I am the bread of life"—"I am the way, the truth, and the life"—in such terms does Jesus testify of Himself. "In Him was life," says one Apostle, "and the life was the light of men;" "Christ our life" is the emphatic designation applied to Him by another. And where, but in Christ, is true life to be found? The world for eighteen centuries has found in Him the ideal of humanity. Unbeliever and believer alike have acknowledged the purity, the glory, of His character. The highest life we know, or can conceive of, is an imitation of Christ. And if we share that craving for immortality, to which reference has already been made; if we yearn for the life after death, and shrink from the thought of death as annihilation; where can faith find a foothold, how can we rise above the vaguest conjectures, how meet the theories of unbelief, if we cannot look into that sepulchre from which ere long the stone was to be rolled away, and hear the angel voice proclaim, "He is not here; He is risen. Why seek ye the living among the dead?" But if He has thus burst the bars of the grave, if He be thus the first-born from the dead, our hope is not in vain. He conquered not for Himself alone but for us. He came in His humiliation, footsore and weary —One in whom men saw no beauty that they should

desire Him—and declared, "I am the resurrection and the life," proving His right to the title by a deed of unheard-of wondrousness. How should He not evince the same power, and manifest the same glory, when He shall come amid the clouds of heaven, and they that are in their graves shall awake, and those that are His shall be with Him evermore.

He is the *life*. He can bestow it, He can restore it—"He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." It is not with Him a question of degree; it is His not only to revive a flame that is burning low, but to kindle anew the flame that is already out. The skilful physician can do much to alleviate the pains or turn back the tide of disease; while there is life, there is hope; but when the vital spark has fled, his power is gone. But hope will never abandon him who believeth in the Son of God. There is a voice that will one day say of every faithful one, "Our friend sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep."

And He is the *preserver* of the life that is—"Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." It is the spirit of this saying which meets us constantly in the Apostolic writings, when we observe how, through faith in Christ, the bodily death becomes a mere episode in the career of the immortal spirit. The true death in the view of the Apostles is the death in trespasses and sins—he that believeth not is condemned already, the judgment is already past with him; the true resurrection is the rising with Christ, the awakening to the life of obedience and love and holiness. This resurrection may take place now; the bodily resurrection when

it comes will be but the manifestation of a glory already in existence. What, then, does death become but the putting off a body of death, the setting free the living spirit for its endless, upward progress? Here we are absent from the Lord, there we shall see Him face to face; what wonder if those who hold this faith and hope, while in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened, and that they have a longing to depart and to be with Christ which is far better?

"I am the resurrection and the life." "We are buried with Him by baptism into death," writes St Paul to the Romans, "that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Let us leave behind us our old lives of selfishness and worldliness and sin. To souls that were unconscious of their high destiny, their heavenly calling, His voice comes summoning them to fellowship with Him. Upon the sorrows of humanity He sheds the radiance of heavenly comfort; to the sinful He offers the blessedness of forgiveness. He sanctifies every trouble, and hallows every joy; till we, like Mary, sit at His feet and find *He* is better and more to us than all His gifts. For

> "One deep love doth supersede
> All others, when her ardent gaze
> Roves from the living brother's face
> And rests upon the Life indeed."

"Awake, then, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!"

BLIND BARTIMÆUS

The Importunate Prayer for Light

By Rev. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

BLIND BARTIMÆUS

The Importunate Prayer for Light

"And Jesus said unto him: What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto Him: Lord, that I should receive my sight. And Jesus said: Thy faith hath made thee whole."—Mark x. 51, 52.

Nothing could be more common-place than the beginning of this story. A blind man sitting by the roadside begging. We see that every week; we might see it every day. But we do not see these men as Christ saw them. Blind men seem to have had a peculiar power in drawing out His sympathies. These poor creatures from whom the light and beauty were always hidden fetched His pity at once. And they affected Him the more because they reminded Him of His greater work. They were a type of blind humanity. All men had the darkening veil upon their eyes, and He had come to call them from darkness unto light.

Jesus was passing by, with a confused and noisy crowd of people following and surrounding, when suddenly, above the tramp of feet and hubbub of voices, this man's piteous wail for mercy rose. It sounded like the ordinary beggar's cry for alms, and the people,

knowing that Jesus had no money to give, told the man to hold his tongue. He cried out all the more. Then the Lord stood still, commanded them to bring the man near, and asked him: "What wilt thou?" It was not money he wanted, but something almost as dear as life—something that would make life worth living—open eyes, light, sight, a vision of God's world, sunlight sky, and faces of men. He wanted that, and nothing else at present; everything was included in that; it would be like heaven itself. There were tears of agonising entreaty on his face and in his voice, as he answered: "Lord, that I might receive my sight." And Jesus could never say no to such impassioned prayers as this. In a moment faith had its reward. The man's long night was changed as by a lightning flash into noon day glory. "Immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way." Now, here is a simple story, with certain plain lessons for us and all men.

I.

The man got the one thing which he was bent on having.

It was the victory of a determined will. Our Lord Jesus always yielded to those who would take no nay. All the rougher forces in the world could not turn Him aside a step; but the importunate prayer of a beggar or a Syrophœnician woman could get anything from Him. Persistency never failed to

open the floodgates of His power. This man had learned the secret of success, whether in things heavenly or things earthly. He cried for the one thing he wanted until he got it. "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?"

It is *will* power that wins. It wins most of the prizes of this life, and it wins the crown of eternal life. There is hardly any door which will not open to persistent knocking; and the steepest road can be surmounted by determined feet. We do not gain what we *wish* for, but we do, for the most part, gain what we *will*. The two things are no more alike than the fleecy snowflakes are like the white limestone rocks on which they fall. Wishing never brings a man anything except the pictures of a dream, which speedily vanish; and it is well for him that it does not. If we could get by wishing, there would be some strange transformation scenes. Every preacher would be a Spurgeon or Wesley; every member of the choir would be a Patti or Jenny Lind; every little child would be a man; every Christian would have his name in the roll of saints; every bicycle rider would win the champion cup, and probably break his neck in keeping it; every person in a congregation would be as rich as a Vanderbilt, and as uneasy; and we should all go fooling and destroying ourselves together. Happily for us all these idle wishes come to nought.

There are people who are always wishing, but they make no effort of will; and they might as well try to dance upon the point of a needle, or reach the seventh heaven on a pair of stilts. They wish for all manner of good things—sweet tempers, gracious

qualities, spiritual excellencies, Christ-like attainments. If every wish were gratified, they would be ripe for glory any day. But their wishes come and go, like the guests of an inn, always changing. They heave a passing sigh as they look at a beautiful life, and say, Ah, I wish I could be like that; and there is an end of it. The place which is nameless is paved with the good resolutions of those who are continually wishing and never striving to win. It is only fairies that come when wishes call them. God holds Himself back until the wish becomes a mighty determination, an earnest struggle to attain. Then He says: "Be it unto thee according to thy faith." There is not a besetting sin which you may not overcome; there is not an evil spirit in you, however strong and terrible, which you cannot get driven out of you, if you go about it with a fixed unalterable purpose. Every one of you can be a good man or woman, if we think it worth the effort, and if you do not give up the climb after the first fall or two. There is a possible saint in every man, but it takes sustained labour and prayer to hew and carve it into shape out of the rough quarry in which it lies hidden. You *can* live the Christian life, though it is not easy; but it will require at least as much continued thought and energy as you give to the making of your business. What do you long for most, and set your hearts upon with greatest intensity? That is the question that God asks. "What *wilt* thou?" If you would win Christ-like character, a noble manhood, patience, purity, self-masterhood, beauty of soul, you must count it the thing best worth winning, and strive for it as the runner in the race strives to reach the goal.

It is the man who prays and labours every day for the good divine thing, and takes no refusal, that gains it. "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?"

II.

The thing which this man asked for was best of all.

It certainly was for him; and I question whether there is any better thing for us, to begin with—"Lord, that I should receive my sight." It would have done that man little good if Jesus had made him a present of the whole world, and the golden streets and pearly gates of heaven as well, and left him sitting in the darkness, with the awful night brooding for ever over heart and mind. And it would not add the least iota to your sum total of enjoyment, if you were made master of the world and all its lands and wealth, and had no enlightenment of mind and heart to see the best and divinest things in it. The greatest of God's gifts to us is the unspeakable gift—the gift of His dear Son; but next to that in preciousness is what the Bible calls the gift of the seeing eye. How much the seeing eye means in ordinary things! It really makes the great difference between abounding wealth and extreme poverty. The millionaire may be as poor as the pauper is, and even poorer. He *may* be, if his eyes see nothing but gold, shares, stocks, banks, and figures; if the whole world for him is packed into a

small corner, and includes nothing but his fine house, sumptuous carriage, money bags, cheque book, and office in the Exchange. He is as poor as a church mouse. There is hardly a man in existence whose enjoyments are more limited than his. A man is only master and owner of what he truly sees—sees with kindly loving eyes. You may say that a hundred square miles of mountain, glen, river, copse, and landscape belong to him. Yes, by title deeds; but the true possessor of it is he who walks through it with something of the poet's eye, finding it cram full of God and beauty, and thanking God at every step for making the world so fair.

You may buy a picture of Titian or Turner which costs you five or ten thousand pounds; you may gather together, at an enormous cost, a library of all the world-famous books, bound in gold and morocco; and all the joy you ever get from them is in hearing people congratulate you on the possession of such treasures. If your eyes are not open to the beauty which is hidden in them—if you can only see their money value, what does all that come to? You are not half so rich in reality as the Scotch peasant who reads his Bible and his Robert Burns, and revels in them, or the mother who keeps the miniature picture of her absent boy, and looks at it, and kisses it, and murmurs a prayer over it every day for his dear sake. Why should you grieve and fret because you cannot call more of the world your own? Ask God to open your eyes, and then every bit of this world will belong to you. That was what the Apostle Paul said. He wrote to certain people who had been in darkness, and had been brought into marvellous light.

He described them as having had the eyes of their understanding enlightened, and then he went on to say: "All things are yours, whether things present or things to come, all are yours." God belonged to them, because they saw His presence everywhere; Jesus belonged to them, because they saw His beauty and saving power; all their fellow-men belonged to them, because they saw their fellow-men with other larger eyes. And their lives were full to overflowing, and radiant with hope and joy: "As having nothing, yet possessing all things."

That is the best prayer we can offer—"Lord, that I might receive my sight." We all need it. For the wisest and sharpest of us only see a few things through a glass darkly. We are like that man in another miracle, whose eyes Christ had only half opened, and who saw men as trees walking. We need this prayer, and it is a prayer which gets answered, if we offer it frequently. I do not suppose that prayer will bring us the gift of genius. It will not enable us to see all that the poet sees or the artist. No! but it will enlarge and clear our vision in a hundred other ways. It will help you to see more of God in everything, and to see all the good and noble things about you. It will give you an appreciation of all the mercies which surround your path. It will save you from looking always at the dark side of things. It will give you a truer understanding of the meaning of life, and show you what grand possibilities there are in it. It will give you a true vision of yourselves, and make the Bible another book, and Jesus a new creation, and everything else new. Do not ask for fortune, prosperity, success.

Ask that your soul may be enlightened, and your eyes opened. Happiness lies in that direction, not in the other. That is the best thing—"Lord, that I might receive my sight."

III.

When this man got his prayer answered, he saw, and went after the best.

Immediately he had received his sight he followed Jesus in the way. There was a whole universe of wonderful and beautiful things disclosed to him. It must have been so. You cannot imagine what a blind man would feel at such a moment, when the whole panorama of nature and human life was set before him suddenly for the first time. You have seen it always. It has become familiar to you, and the wonder, romance, and glory of it, have for the most part died away. To him it would be all a new creation—the blessed sunshine, the blue of the sky, the green of the meadows, the tall palm trees, the palaces and walls of Jericho, the crowd of people, the faces of women and children. Imagine all this beauty springing upon him at once; you can fancy him saying, I could feast my eyes on these things for ever. And then read this final touch: "He followed Jesus in the way." There was nothing so well worth looking at as that dear face—nothing which drew him so much as the service and attractive power of Jesus. And when your eyes are fully opened, it will

always be with the same result. You will see nothing in the world so fair and so desirable as the face in which the despisers of the Lord saw no beauty. There is nothing in the world which will draw you so powerfully as His love and sorrow and eternal promises. His service will be the main thing, and nothing will keep you back from following Jesus in the way.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE

By Rev. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE

"Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig-tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away."—MATTHEW xxi. 18, 19.

ONE cannot help feeling that unless Jesus had cursed the barren fig-tree He would not have appeared in all His completeness as the Image of the invisible God. The All-wise Creator, whose plans are being worked out by all the creatures which, in their teeming millions, inhabit the earth and sea, has ordained that, in this world at least, perpetual destruction should be going on side by side with continual renewal of life. Terror is here as well as tenderness, judgment as well as mercy. Sacrifices are constantly being called for in order to serve the higher life of the world. Probably one of the reasons our Lord had for cursing the fig-tree was to warn us against the danger of forgetting the sterner features of divine judgment amid our sweet thought of divine mercy.

I.

Looking at the fig-tree as a silent teacher, we may regard it first as an emblem of those who have been favoured in their circumstances, and who are attractive, with an appearance of promise.

In the days of our Lord fig-trees were abundant in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, especially near the village of Bethphage, "the house of green figs," as the name implies; and Stanley tells us in his *Sinai and Palestine* that such trees are still sprinkled over the Mount of Olives. But this tree evidently stood out prominent in its solitariness, for (as the margin accurately translates the statement of Matthew) "Jesus saw one fig-tree by the wayside." It was standing apart from others, so that it was not overshadowed by them, but had every possible advantage which the sun could give. Hence it was that so early in the season it had already put forth its broad green leaves, and as blossoms and fruit preceded these, it was not unnatural to expect figs from it. It is true that Mark says, "The time of figs was not yet," but he would not have gone out of his way to say this if it had seemed a difficulty to his mind, or if it had suggested something unreasonable in our Lord's expectation. What he meant was, that as the season of fig-gathering had not come, it was likely that any fruit already put forth by the tree would still be on

it, because it had not been stripped by the fig-gatherers; and he further suggests by the phrase that Jesus did not look for figs because it was the season, but because this tree was peculiarly favoured and forward. Our Lord always subordinated the natural to the spiritual, and on this occasion, forgetting His own hunger, He saw in this promising tree an emblem of Jerusalem, over whose falseness and impenitence He had wept bitterly the day before—an emblem, indeed, of the whole Jewish nation which, in spite of its advantages and of its professions, yielded no fruit either in penitence or in righteousness. Splendid in profession, Judaism was bereft of real piety, and as on the leafy but barren tree, so on it the curse of God was about to fall.

The Jews, however, were not the last people richly favoured in circumstances, and to all appearances full of promise, yet fruitless in the judgment of God. Around us and among us such may be found. Some, for example, flourish intellectually, who are barren morally. With natural gifts well cultivated, they are authorities upon special subjects. Keen in their perceptions, logical in their inductions, powerful in their mode of putting facts, they exercise an influence wide and deep. But those who know them intimately, and see them at close quarters, recognise that they are reckless and perhaps even profligate, for mental power is not a necessary sign of moral self-restraint. Sometimes such facts as these are self-evident. We admit, however, that of others we, with our shortsightedness, are unable to judge, and rejoice to know that He who will decide their destiny and ours is One who, with unerring fidelity, can turn back the leaves of mere

profession, and look behind the brilliance of intellectual gifts in order to discern what real love there is to God, and to man for God's sake. Our own mistakes, on the contrary, are so frequent that we may well listen to the mandate, "Judge not that ye be not judged." On the one hand, those who are despised or disliked may be among God's chosen ones. A rough exterior may hide the noblest self-sacrifice. One who passes unnoticed amongst more brilliant companions may be the burden-bearer at home, who is to it one of God's ministering angels. The dullard whom every one thinks he may take advantage of, may be amongst the bravest servants of the Most High, and may be qualifying, by patient continuance in well-doing, for the throne and the crown by-and-by. On the other hand, the brilliant genius may end by weeping in vain over his wasted life. How often those who, so far as ordinary duties are concerned, are all they should be, in God's judgment are practically Godless. Industrious in daily work, amiable in disposition, pleasant in manner, there is nevertheless about them a lack of earnest conviction, of genuine devotion, and of that faith in God without which it is impossible to please Him. They are favoured as the fig-tree was which grew in the open, they are full of promise as it was when it put forth leaves while other trees were bare; but when the Lord comes to look for fruit He finds in them nothing but leaves only.

II.

We may see in the luxuriant fig-tree an emblem of some to whom Jesus comes with a hungry heart, yet comes in vain.

We read that, "being hungry," He went up to the fig-tree expecting fruit, and was disappointed at finding none. He was not without experience of such disappointment, because He had put limits on His omniscience, as well as on His miraculous power. As Paul expressed it, "He emptied Himself of His glory," He shed some of His attributes in order that He might be truly the Son of Man. From the first He deliberately put aside out of the range of use for Himself, the power which He sometimes freely used for the benefit of others. "He saved others, Himself He cannot save."

With Jesus, hunger of appetite was easier to bear than hunger of heart. Far sadder than on this occasion was His disappointment in finding no fruits of righteousness amongst the leaders of God's own people. They were eminently religious so far as profession was concerned. Their religious services were gorgeous, and their observances punctilious, but there was no Godliness about them. They tithed every herb in the garden—mint, anise, and cummin—but they omitted the weightier matters of the law—judgment, mercy, and faith; and while the ecclesiastics were hypocritical, the mass of the people were carnal and worldly.

We must not forget that Jesus Christ is still the Searcher of hearts; that He comes into the business world, into the home, and into the church, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God, and who earnestly strive to serve Him. His hand brushes aside the leaves of mere profession. He takes little account of beautiful foliage, because He hungers for fruit, and looks everywhere to find it. He comes to those who are active in benevolent enterprise to see whether the motive whence it springs is good; He looks below the surface of our professedly Christian life to see whether the heart is right with God; He visits those whose criticism of the lives of others is a practical assumption that their own lives are good, and asks, "How is it with yourself?" He searches the daily life to see if those whose theology is correct, and whose profession of Christian experience is unctuous, are controlling their tempers and becoming Christ-like in the business and the household; and sometimes He has to turn aside with a sigh, as one who says, "Nothing but leaves."

III.

The barren fig-tree is an emblem of one who fails in the great purposes of his existence.

Some trees are not meant to bear fruit. We grow them for their foliage in our shrubberies, or for timber that we may use in our buildings, or for shade from the heat of the sun. It would be no disparage-

ment to say of these, "They bear nothing but leaves." But fig-trees are meant to bear fruit, and if they do not do that they may justly be cut down as cumberers of the ground.

Now God has created many beings around us whose instincts are marvellous, and whose work is wonderful, but they are evidently intended for this life only. If they do what is expected of them here, all is well. The bee makes her honey; the horse draws our carts; the dog protects our home, and so on; but their Creator does not expect of them loyal worship and intelligent service. This, however, is what He does expect of us. As the old catechism puts it, "*Man's* chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." If, for example, you do your daily work diligently, and if you deal with those around you in accordance with the laws of the community, supporting your children and caring for your home, you so far do well, but you are doing no more than the ants, or bees, and other despised creatures do. If, meantime, you have no thought beyond this life, and make no preparation for the unseen future, and if you live without any conscious recognition of God, you are obviously failing in the one great object of your existence. Your life, with all its present possibilities and enjoyment, is being wasted, and must end in banishment from the God whom you refuse to think of.

Indeed, we must go further. Is not the mere enjoyment of our own pardon and religious life insufficient to satisfy our Lord, who Himself became the servant of others? Christianity is not a sort of insurance office at which, in return for a given

amount of faith and goodness, you insure yourself against the risk of perdition in the future. It is a service, it is a self-consecration, it is a giving-up of self to Christ, it is a giving-forth of self to others—it is, in short, bearing fruit. I do not say that this fruit-bearing must be obviously connected with recognised Christian communities alone, or even chiefly. In the broadest sense, I hold that all good and conscientious work is Church work, if only it is work done for the kingdom of God. The lawyer may serve the Just One in his profession; the physician may fulfil the command of Jesus, "Heal the sick"; the scientific man may reveal Him who is the faithful and true, in whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning. We gladly recognise all this, but whether there or here, Christ's hungry heart is unsatisfied if there is no serving others for His sake, while we profess to be His. Then He is disappointed with us, as He was when He turned aside from the luxuriant fig-tree, having found on it nothing but leaves.

How much more perilous the state of any who live merely for dress or for company, who spend their time in self-indulgence, and whose thoughts never go beyond things seen and temporal. If they were insects dancing in the evening sunshine, or if they were brute beasts plodding at a plough, they might be justified in being as they are; but if they are to live for ever, if life is so precious and its issues so momentous that the Son of God died in order to make future blessedness possible to them, then surely He ought to find in their hearts love and faith—those buds of promise which will be sure to ripen into fruit.

IV.

The barren fig-tree is an emblem of one who is nigh unto cursing. "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever," said Jesus, and immediately the fig-tree withered away.

Nature (that is the God of Nature) is perpetually destroying what is barren and useless. Dead leaves fall, rotten branches break, and new life succeeds the old. Can we wonder, then, that the same law should hold good in relation to human life? Does not the death and decay of our body intimate the probability of the destroying power of evil over the soul not only here but hereafter?

And what is the nature of the punishment set forth by this miracle? It is a confirmation of state. The fruitless fig-tree was condemned to fruitlessness in the future. The punishment of the soul, also, is the resistless fixing of human choice. Over the gates of hell is inserted the motto, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still." Indeed, even in this world we can see that the woe affixed to going astray is the tendency to go further astray.

The curse exemplified in this acted parable is inward, not outward. The disciples noticed that the fig-tree withered from its roots, not from its leaves. It was not as if a hot breath had passed through the atmosphere, but as if the secret spring of life had been touched. It withered outwardly because it had been cursed inwardly. Nor can there be any punish-

ment more to be dreaded than that. To lose the power of loving because we would not love; to have the guidance of conscience no longer because we refused to listen to its voice; to feel no more sensible to divine goodness because we steel our hearts against it for years; to be banished from Christ because we would not come to Him—this is a sentence so just that no one can question it, but a sentence so terrible that we may well tremble at the possibility of it. Before us, in nature, stands that barren fig-tree; before us, in history, stands the outcast Jewish nation; and over these the Apostle says, in words of solemn warning, "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee."

But let us rejoice that besides this miracle our Lord gives us a parable from the fig-tree. He shows in the miracle how suddenly and resistlessly retribution may come, but He shows in the parable how again and again the husbandman asks, in regard even to the useless tree, "Let it alone this year also." Opportunity is still given for penitence and prayer, and for that faith in God to which the Saviour refers in the following verse: a faith which is able to overthrow every mountain of difficulty, and to give us hope in the place of despondency, life in the stead of death. Therefore let the prayer of each of us be that of Charles Wesley:

"Give me the faith which can remove
And sink the mountain to a plain;
Give me the childlike, praying love,
Which longs to build Thy house again;
Thy love, let it my heart o'erpower,
Let it my ransomed soul devour."

THE MIRACLE OF REPARATION

The Healing of Malchus's Ear

By Rev. THOMAS G. SELBY

THE MIRACLE OF REPARATION

The Healing of Malchus's Ear

"And he touched his ear, and healed him."—Luke xxii. 51.

John is alone in giving the name of this servant of the high priest whom Jesus healed, as well as of the apostle who was his assailant. The apparent intimacy of the beloved disciple with certain inmates of the high priest's palace may explain the fact that he knew this bond servant's name. At any earlier date it might have been impolitic to mention Simon Peter's part in the fray. When the fourth Gospel was written, the rash champion was beyond all earthly praise or blame. Apart from John's assertion, we might have conjectured which man of the Twelve was the assailant of this officious slave. A reader of the earlier Gospels would have assuredly said the fiery smiter was Simon, son of Jonas.

Luke only makes specific mention of the miracle, but the other Evangelists perhaps presuppose it. But for this act of supernatural reparation, would Simon Peter have ventured to follow, even afar off, into the palace? The assailant would surely have kept in hiding at this momentous hour, if a wound could have

been shown in proof of his violence. The miracle convinced him that this act of a disciple would not be made one of the counts in the Master's trial; for the crafty priests were only too anxious to avoid any reference to Christ's wonderful works. But for this deed of healing, what a telling indictment might have been framed to justify the course taken by the ruling authorities of the temple! Resisting the officers of the high priest's court in the discharge of their duties! These free lances from Galilee spilling blood once more, and whetting the passions of the mob! Such an allegation Pilate would have looked upon as of serious import. But the miracle foreclosed the charge. Not only was there no injury to show, but the wound healed by Christ's touch was presumptive evidence that there was something substantial in the claim made for the Prophet of Nazareth, and that He was not as other men. Such evidence the priests and their friends would only be too eager to keep in the background. The other narratives leave us free to put some such construction upon the incident, if they do not directly imply it.

I.

This miracle, wrought as Jesus was emerging from the distress of Gethsemane, and passing to the agony of His Cross, teaches that His power was independent of outward circumstance.

Not a little of the power in common men is excited by the enthusiasm of the multitude. The belief they

have in themselves reflects and epitomises the many converging beliefs which centre upon their personality. Political leaders are sometimes incapable of strong, solitary, unapplauded statesmanship. Unless the passion of the populace is behind them, they are weak as water. The irradiated faces of a spellbound crowd help the voice of the singer to ranges inaccessible in solitary practice. Ten thousand heart-beats reinforce the genius of the man who is making himself the mouthpiece of a widespread aspiration. The most commanding leaders sometimes become limp, inane, and ineffectual when they are left alone.

Now that they see Him treated as a common felon, Christ's own followers are disenchanted. Those nearest to Him have little more than half-beliefs left. But the wonder-working power of the Prophet is the same, for it does not rest upon outward stimulations. Whilst the attending disciples, filled with dismay, are just girding up their loins for flight, our Lord works His last earthly miracle, sign of the fact that He does not draw His power from the plaudits and frenzied enthusiasms of the multitude; but from a source higher than the rising and setting sun and stars. He heals just as promptly as when the hills and valleys were alive with the wondering crowds who followed Him from place to place. He obeys the promptings of the divine pity which speaks within Him, and in the midst of His armed and cursing foes, heals with as significant a mastery as when the aristocracy of a small town came out to support the Centurion's prayer. The emergency of the hour required it, and He could heal unbesought, as well as in response to tears and

pleadings. His own life was in peril, and He was just coming forth from His red sweat of agony, and yet He could restore the maimed as triumphantly as in the sunshine and amidst the singing of the birds. His power arose in an eternal relation that was beyond the accidents of time and place. Students of psychology tell us that the powers last acquired are the first to fade. This wonder-working prerogative was not an accomplishment attained in the consummation of His human development, but belonged to the deep, abiding, elemental facts of His nature. His divine power and Godhead were asserted in His profoundest humiliation.

Luke's record of this miracle supplies an appropriate and effectual answer to one of the assumptions in Renan's *Life of Christ.* The captivating spokesman of French Rationalism admits the perfect sincerity of Jesus, but finds himself confronted by the claim to miraculous power and superhuman rank the hero of his story had obviously made. The theory devised to meet the difficulty is practically what we should now describe as thought-transference, or unconscious telepathy. As the young Prophet passed from place to place in the fulfilment of His vocation, zealous friends and admirers encircled Him, and watched His power over the crowds. At length they began to credit Him with feats of instantaneous healing. The belief of His enthusiastic comrades and disciples dominated His own mind, and at length He imagined Himself a depositary of the wonderful powers ascribed to Him by devoted worshippers. And, according to this chapter in the ingenious romance, the miracles began to dwindle with the

decline of popularity in the last year of His ministry. But Luke's narrative enables us to see that this so-called illusion persists in the mind which has somewhat reluctantly entertained it after the very mainspring of its vitality has been destroyed. The applause of the multitude is over, haunting the memory only like the sad murmur of a far-off sea. Dejected and disappointed disciples are on the tip-toe for flight. Infuriated foes who laugh to scorn His claims, gape upon Him like bulls of Bashan. Pikes and knives, spears and lances, glitter in the moonlight. Having surrendered Himself to His captors, who bind Him, He asks permission to withdraw His hand from their toils for this last act of grace and power. His popularity was at low-water mark. Does this look as though His claim to superhuman gifts had been suggested by the faith of credulous and excited followers? The healing virtue with which He was replenished knew no finite vicissitudes, and did not ebb with the tide of His outward fortunes. The consciousness of it was not kindled by the enthusiasm of His disciples, or this last touch would have issued in ignominious disenchantment both for Himself and for others.

The moraines, in mountain valleys, mark the melting line of old glaciers. The old ice-rivers could not carry the boulders they had borne from the mountain heights an inch beyond the point at which they were dissolved. This miracle lies beyond the zone at which popular enthusiasm has melted away, and Jesus achieves it, not by the stimulating plaudits of His followers, but by the will and indwelling power of the Father with whom He is one.

In one of his graphic stories, Sir Walter Scott gives

a striking description of the stupor into which Charles, Duke of Burgundy, fell after his defeat at the hands of the Swiss, and just before the conflict in which he lost his life. He had always been fastidious in dress and zealous for all the detailed proprieties of royal courts. No one had seen him with tousled head or untrimmed beard, crumpled fold in his robe or speck of dirt on his trappings. From the time of his first defeat he grew indifferent to outward appearances. Robe was left unclasped, nails uncut, beard and head matted into foul tangles, and he was all but dead to the events which were occurring around him, fateful omens for the coming battle. In his humiliation at the hands of the foe, he had lost the sense of majesty and all the instincts of kingship, and this loss was a sign of his own collapse and a precursor of crushing and final overthrow.

How unlike the picture of Jesus in His hour of sorrow presented to us by the third Evangelist! A captive in the hands of His ruthless foes, He yet retains a sense of kingship and all the marks of authority. There is here no mental deshabille, significant of paralysing despondency and imminent defeat. No temper of panic or faltering faith operates to dissipate His miraculous power. Bound by ruthless foes, His royal, creative word can bid the forces which repair and heal. A prisoner, He can yet direct with His high command the subtle laws and resources of the universe, and enlist them for the last benignity of His earthly mission. No lassitude or negligence appears to tell of a self-conscious impotence and despair. In His bitterest humiliations He is as royal as when bidding the troubled waves die down or attracting the love

and the homage of the multitudes. His power and the motives which order its manifestations are unimpaired by outward change. His kingship survives obloquy. The present tribulations impose no limit upon His resources, and cast no shade of dimness upon the splendour of His attributes. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." The throne still looms in undefined majesty through the present shame, and the magic authority of His sceptre gleams with a strange lightning flash through the darkness. The power of His troubled and storm-driven personality is a steadfast and an abiding verity. This incident of the Gospel story is said to be simple to the point of triviality, but the miracle, looked at in its surroundings, is no less wonderful than the healing of the lepers and the raising of the dead. It is the parting splendour of the Redeemer's earthly day, a miracle of the hour and power of His passion. "He touched his ear and healed him."

II.

This incident asserts not only His undiminished power in the abyss of shame, but His unchanging magnanimity under insult and dishonour.

Malchus, who was a body-servant of the high priest, had no official part to play in this arrest, and it seems probable that Peter's rash blow was a reprisal to some act of contempt and gratuitous cruelty. Base-born wretch that he was, he dared to

lay rough, profane hands upon the sacred person of Jesus, an affront under which the disciples could not stand quietly by. The difference between the Master and His followers is shown in this, that their first impulse was to execute justice upon the wrong-doer, whilst His first impulse was to show mercy, and to save. By stilling pain, and healing the open wound, Jesus shows that He will not only bear the insult of this ruffian slave, but answer his insult with friendship and benefaction. When we are at the zenith of our power, it is easy to forgive those beneath us, or at least to maintain a serene indifference towards them that looks like forgiveness. Some men seem too insignificant for our revenge. But how difficult to forgive those who for the moment chance to have the whip-hand over us, especially if they are of coarse antecedents and inferior moral worth. The arrest of Jesus left Him at the mercy of a bond-slave. And yet, amidst abasement and undeserved shame, He forgives the railing menial, and brings all the wealth of Godhead to His help. Simple as this miracle may be, when put side by side with other displays of His superhuman power, in motive and essential spirit it is replete with moral grandeur, and fitly crowns the signs and wonders of a lifetime. In other incidents the grace of healing is bestowed in answer to the prayers of the sufferers or their friends. This mighty work was wrought upon a mean, puffed-up slave, who perhaps would have scorned to ask help from his master's prisoner. With evil faces glaring round Him in the torch-light, Jesus heals just as benignly as when the genial day spread itself out over the hills of Galilee. No wrong can touch the

quick of His pride and sting Him into revenge. The last act of the unbound hand is to render good for evil by its mystic touch, as the first word, when cords are exchanged for nails, is one imploring forgiveness. Jesus is not dependent upon His outward associations for the inspiration of His high motive or for endowments of healing power. If He could forgive the slave whose heel was planted for the moment upon His neck, will He not forgive those who lie in contrition at His feet?

This incident is typical and represents two rival principles which are seeking to assert themselves in human history. The disciples of Jesus seek to deal with men by a rude law of justice according to their deserts; whilst Jesus seeks to deal with them according to the riches of His grace and by the gentlest arts of persuasion. Simon Peter believed that the sword was the best remedy for wrong, but Jesus believed that healing sympathy which undid the mischief of the sword was the only effectual cure. This was the last struggle of a half-regenerate apostle for an earthly kingdom in which his Lord was to reign. The hasty matter-of-fact man had armed himself, perhaps at the cost of his raiment, because he mistook similitude and hyperbole for solemn counsel. Recent experiences of hostility had ripened him for the error. Martial tempers had been rekindled by the thickening wrongs of the last few weeks, and at length burst into flames amidst the indignities which succeeded to the agony of the garden. Zeal to redress wrong by the traditional methods was widening the breach between the Twelve and the Master. For some time past the disciples

had wrought no miracles of healing. Perhaps the resentments aroused by growing persecution had dried up their compassions and made them less susceptible channels of healing power. The exhortation to forgiveness repeated at the foot of Hermon, when Jesus was instructing them in the faith which could save from failure, seems to imply that tempers of retaliation were sapping their strength. And as spiritual power failed, they were tempted to fall back upon brute-force in furthering their Master's name and cause. But the mood of Jesus Himself was unruffled by the culminating hostility and persecution of the last three months. He could not regard the worst men for whom He was to die as mere antagonists to be fought with, mutilated, and trampled underfoot. The final act of His life as a free citizen was a protest against the use of force to avenge wrong and uphold His cause. The victories of His kingdom must be achieved by a love whose touch can banish pain and bring ease to rankling wounds.

The Malchus miracle did not settle the controversy between those who fall back upon the weapons of the flesh and those who would serve the truth by the fine persuasions of a gracious spirit. Echoes of the dispute are still heard in our churches as well as in our Houses of Legislature, and the old issue is being waged. It is a part of the enduring strife between the first Adam and the second. We want temporal kingdoms still, churches not only protected against persecution but buttressed by force and pampered by privilege, the veiled sword laid side by side with the Bible, schools kept by the loot of distraint officers to serve the policy of petty religious sects, a bouncing

swashbuckler type of Christianity ready to resent offence as a London apprentice of the Middle Ages. We belong to Moses, who slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand, rather than to the new Deliverer who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, and when He suffered, threatened not. We lack the Lord's infinite capacity for meekness, long-suffering, forgiveness; and whilst the lack continues cannot be true to His methods and promote His kingdom. The brute force brought to bear upon men, even in the name of the Christian religion, always unfits them to become the subjects of purely spiritual processes. The martinet can never make ready a people for the Lord. Simon Peter's sword wounded the soul of this slave much more gravely than his ear, and but for the miracle which undid the mischief, Malchus might have been the one man in the world who would have been produced as a witness to discredit Jesus Christ. This healing act of gentleness not only made him a friend, but may have prepared him to hear the evangel of the Pentecost, and to feel its great magnetic tides of influence. In those unseen atmospheres which insphere us, the Spirit of Jesus still moves as it listeth, creating benign counteractions to our evil and intolerant tempers, repairing the tragic errors into which we are rushed by our passion for righteousness, and showing that mercy to offenders against the honour of Christ in which we so often fall short. Every age has its rash, impetuous Simons to whom our hearts go out, and it is strange they have not utterly destroyed the faith. They do more towards that end than the persecutor. But Christianity is kept alive by miracle, and the miracle is a repetition in varied form of that

performed upon Malchus. The healing compassions of Jesus pour balm and wholeness into the wounds dealt out in His name.

III.

This incident is a typical picture of the way in which Jesus amends the errors of His body-guard and compensates the world.

It was perhaps necessary for three purposes: (1) To protect His disciples; (2) To vindicate His own name; (3) To make men's accountability for faith depend upon His own acts rather than upon the acts of His followers.

This miracle of healing protects Simon and his comrades against the vengeful reprisals they had challenged, and rehabilitates them before their fellow-countrymen and the Romans. Jesus is a many-sided peacemaker, mediating for His followers amongst men as well as in the presence of God on high. This miracle is spiritually affiliated to the great work He was about to accomplish. Under the Old Covenant offences attached to the priests for which specific expiations were required. Jesus, the spotless high priest, atones for the priests of the new kingdom, taking away their trespasses from before the face of God and man. Not more than an hour ago, in the paschal chamber, He had breathed forth His last earthly intercession for disciples, and He was almost in sight of the Cross on which He was to clothe that intercession with unlimited power. And in the interval Jesus

does a work which mediates for His followers with their bitter antagonists, and becomes a sign to protect them from the penalty of their own rashness. As for Himself, He has never needed to make a concession either to the multitude or to the rulers, and whatever He suffers at their hands is undeserved. His pain is vicarious. But it is not so with His followers, for they have sometimes stirred up the displeasure of their contemporaries. He heals for the sake of Simon, as well as to appease the sense of wrong in the soul of Malchus and to remove the stumbling-block that may lie in the path of his salvation. And Jesus still mediates with the world on behalf of a Church which at the best bears His name unworthily. The son of the bondswoman still persecutes the son of the free, and the side of Ishmael in the judgment of society is often the side of right, reason, statute-law. There are even yet scenes in which Esau looks nobler than Jacob; for the Church does not always stand for liberty, brotherhood, impartial justice. Jacob, the heir of the birthright, has a genius for putting himself in compromising positions. Ministers even have been known to preach bloodshed, if it is only done in uniform, and to excuse raiding and robbery, if the great ones of the earth are in the secret. But counteractive reconciliations are at work which must be traced to the hand of Jesus Himself. In one form or another the miracle of Gethsemane is continued—the wounds inflicted by our rashness are so healed that no scar remains; things go on as if the tragic feuds of the midnight which imperilled such sacred interests had been forgotten; and, in the end, the world perhaps thinks quite as kindly of the Church

as it deserves. The soft, noiseless virtue of Jesus Christ still goes out of Him, enthroned in heaven though He is; the gentle healing comes upon the wounded unawares, and the stroke of Simon's blade is forgotten.

This miracle was necessary for the Master's own vindication, for if it had not been wrought He might have been held responsible for the blameworthy act of His follower. In the absence of an effectual reparation, the cause of Jesus was likely to be discredited. A show of force on the part of the Twelve, however feeble, might seem to warrant the use of swords, staves, and an armed band for their Master's capture. Under ancient law a teacher was held to be more or less implicated by the act of his pupil. In the trial of Socrates, one of the charges most fiercely pressed against him was, that young men who had been his devoted hearers took, in several notorious instances, to bad ways. What, Peter, the most intimate and active disciple of Jesus, treading in the steps of the earlier Galilean insurgents! Such a rumour, sustained by the least scrap of evidence, would have been mischievous, if not fatal. This thoughtless sword-stroke might have discredited Jesus, not only to Malchus, but also to the world. It could have been used to give a more serious pretext for a capital sentence than any point actually raised at the trial. A disciple who takes the sword may run the risk of wounding the Lord Himself through some smitten and exasperated adversary. To disavow Simon Peter's plan of campaign and undo his grave mistake, was a step necessary both to clear His own name and to commend His love to

every man. Jesus cannot allow Peter, now or hereafter, to represent Him except upon clearly specified terms. The holiest saint, if put into the place of Jesus, may be betrayed into misjudgment, unseasonable and ill-directed zeal, and perhaps into flagrant sin. Jesus, in His divine power and love, is above His disciples, repairing their follies, atoning for their trespasses, comforting again those upon whom they have brought misjudged pain, and separating Himself from all mistakes which compromise His fame. The beloved apostle himself, perhaps, would scarcely have pitied this brutal slave, for he did not as yet appreciate the character of the God-man, and see how its transcendent greatness needed to be vindicated by a last gracious miracle. If Jew and Gentile are to trust in His name it must be set high in the cloudless sky, and the Redeemer's infinite magnanimity must be asserted before His foes.

This incident teaches that accountability for faith in Jesus Christ is determined by what Jesus Himself does for a man, rather than by the acts of His half-regenerate disciples. This miracle left Malchus and the bystanders without excuse for speaking evil of Jesus, and restored in their full integrity the responsibilities which had been disturbed by the angry impolicy of the Lord's chief apostle. It was the aim of Jesus to make the words and the works of His mission charged with light and love to all men, so to present Himself and His doctrine as to leave every man without excuse. This act of healing took away every pretext from those who might find in the temper of Peter a reason for estrangement from Jesus, and completed all the

factors upon which responsibility rests. They could not hereafter say Jesus was a man who sided with His disciples, right or wrong, nor could they point to a cruel sword-cut to impugn His goodness. If this wounded man had been left to go through the world with a mutilation received in presence of the Redeemer, in the very hour of His consecration to death, in some circles at least, that might have seemed sufficient reason for the rejection of Jesus and His claims. This story of violence, told in the judgment-hall, might have made Pilate through the coming centuries a witness hostile towards Jesus Christ. From the high priest himself down to the high priest's slave, every man who comes into contact with Jesus must be held accountable for his view of this great and holy character, and accountability rests upon what Jesus Himself does, and not upon what Peter does. Peter is often over-ruled. And to-day Jesus still works towards the same end. Malchus, with his half-severed ear, is a spectacle known to most of us, and wherever he appears, there is a Simon Peter lurking in the background. Many of our neighbours may see such dismal specimens of the Christian religion, that we are ready to say they can scarcely be held responsible if they reject its claims. Science, or at least the professor of it, steps out to depreciate religion, and treats the Church with ignominy, and down comes the clumsy sword of an incompetent theologian, and one wonders how cultivated doubters can ever look with respect and good feeling upon Christianity again. Politicians seek to bind the Church and to exploit its resources. The democracy assails it for keeping aloof from the

cause of the people; and the classes insult some sections of it because it speaks for equality and national righteousness. Exasperating reprisals are heard and angry passions are stirred. Christian nations send the scourge of rum, of opium, of disease and war through the territories of the primitive or the half-civilised races of the world, and one wonders how idol-worshippers, who have been so treated, can ever listen with respect to the Christian missionary. A man who has been conspicuous as an evangelist, or who has posed as the foremost spirit in a church, does some foul and disreputable thing, and one questions whether religion will lift its head again in that particular neighbourhood. But secret mediations brood in the air. Mysterious counteractions and antidotes neutralise our reckless and irrational acts, and the cause is not so fatally wrecked as we had feared. Christ's secret ministry of love outweighs the flagrant wrongs of misguided disciples. There are soothing, wonder-working balm-like radiations from His presence which, in unknown ways, compel the world to feel that the Master is above the mistakes of His followers, and that it is to Him we must stand or fall.

This subject should save us from the temptation to despondency, when we find that we have complicated the problems of life by rashness, temerity, blind, hasty, shortsighted impulse. Without the lesson in this miracle we may follow Simon Peter into the abyss of a deeper shame. His error of judgment, and his inability to comprehend at once the significance of this miracle, led on to apostacy. His nerves had been unhinged by this violent outbreak, and he did not discern that the miracle was an adequate apology for his

compromising blow. Jesus forgave this mistaken partisanship as He also forgave the renegade denials and blasphemies by which it was so quickly succeeded. But, for the present, Simon Peter was a victim of impulse, unable to trust in that temporal salvation made sure for the apostles through the healing of the wounded slave. Forgiveness for the dire blunders of the past is extended to us no less than to this offending apostle. Do not look upon any error or infirmity as closing up the path of your future usefulness, and stripping your life of its most sacred promise. Jesus is a sympathising high priest, and makes amends for your unwatchfulness and error as He wrought this Malchus miracle in token of the fact that the cause of His kingdom had not been finally lost by the sword of a militant apostle.

Let us work on in the sure confidence that to the wrongs wrought by an imperfect Church, gracious and gentle counteractions are secretly set up in the souls of men by the Lord who redeemed them. The disciple is pitiably fallible, but above him there stands unseen the infallible and ever-working Master. We are inclined to despair when the seamy side of Church life comes into view, and those whom we desire to reconcile to Christ have ugly experiences of the things a professor of religion can sometimes do. In the name of the Church and of our common Christianity courses of action are sometimes taken, which make us sick at heart and tempt us to say, "Continued work is useless. We will bring our activities to a close. Such a departure from the Christian standard forecloses all hope of success." Cherish no such gloomy views, and do no such

ignoble thing. The Spirit of Jesus often works mightily where His disciples have behaved with disastrous misjudgment. He knows the measure of reparation required. In the darkness of the midnight there is the sweet antidote to pain. Malchus is not left in his blood and disfigurement. Under the shade of the olive garden there is a magic touch of healing, and the winning sweetness of an unasked compassion.

Do not let us presume upon the ministries of recuperation exercised by Jesus Christ towards an aggrieved world. He does not work to facilitate the commission of errors, or to take the darker shades out of them, but to save us from despair when we suddenly find that we have taken a step which does not make for His honour and the interests of His kingdom. With the demonstration of His healing virtue He ever joins the peremptory rebuke of the incriminating error. "Put up thy sword." Beware of trusting in a vigilant providence of expediencies to get you out of the tight places of life as often as you choose to blunder. The sword must be sheathed before the Master stretches out His healing hand. The impulse that drives into wrong must be stifled first, and then only shall there come to us and our victims the outflow of healing, forgiving, and consoling grace. If He draws near to undo as far as may be the catastrophies of the past, He claims, at least, that we shall put ourselves into His hands and let Him order our future. Never make His gracious reparations of the wrong you have done a pretext for after neglect and lawlessness. The man shielded from blame by His recuperative miracle must be docile under His rebuke.

If you have been buffeted justly or unjustly by a noisy follower of Jesus, remember that the offence received cannot dissolve your responsibility to Jesus Himself. He does not defend all the acts of those whom He takes under His care. Of what has the Master Himself defrauded you? His all-encircling personality of love makes the conditions under which you are placed, and in such an environment there is no flaw to be found. God does not send you down to work out your salvation in the world like a diver lowered to his task in a cracked diving-bell. Over and above your relation to a peccable Church there is an insphering relation to an immaculate and all-loving Lord of the Church. Your contact with Jesus Christ is closer than your contact with the primitive offender from whom you count your descent; and the gap which once seemed to open in your responsibilities and make a wide breach there is closed again. The healing love and compassion shown to Malchus created new obligations which more than cancelled the resentments called forth by the wrath of a rash disciple. The sign from His own hand refuted the temper of His chief apostle. Do not seek to extricate yourself from all relationship to Jesus Christ because of some justly grounded antipathy against one of His erring people. His blessing more than outweighs the banning and the opposition of churches which too often misinterpret His mind. The wrong of Simon's blow was more than wiped out by the Master's love. Your duty must ultimately be measured, not by the attitude a disciple assumes towards you, but by the spirit of the great Lord Himself. Round about every man there is breathed an atmosphere of ever-renewed

health and healing. In Him we live and move and have our being, and this is the sphere within which man must act as a moral and responsible being. Let the jar and the shock of some great wrong come to derange and disorganise a man's moral environment, let there be recoil from the Church, the discipleship, and the forms of religion. If the man could only know it he would find the divine love insphering his life afresh and creating new conditions of responsibility. When Peter's blow had been struck, if the history had suddenly stopped, we could have excused Malchus for wrong views of Christ and a policy of continued persecution; but the miracle brought this slave under a new obligation to his Healer, and put him in a changed position towards Jesus Christ, where much might be rightly required at his hands.

THE LAST MIRACLE

The Second Miraculous Draught of Fishes

By Rev. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

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"Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord!"—John xxi. 7.

This, the last miracle of Jesus, like that first miracle wrought by Him in Cana of Galilee, was a revelation of character as well as of power; it was a "manifestation of the glory of the Son." The third Resurrection appearance was pre-eminently a revelation of His Personality. The scene and the circumstance are full of glancing lights and shadows, which throw up the chief figures into relief against the grey background, and especially the chief Figure who revisits that familiar spot, and that no less familiar company of fishers, for the third time since the Resurrection. "Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord!"

I.

In the first place, let us consider the witness of this narrative to the *reality of the Resurrection.* "It is the *Lord!*"

John Ruskin has a passage on this scene in the 4th volume of *Modern Painters* (§ 16), which is so full of vivid pictorial colour that I will venture to quote it at length—

"I suppose there is no event in the whole life of Christ to which, in hours of doubt or fear, men turn with more anxious thirst to know the close facts of it, or with more earnest and passionate dwelling upon every syllable of its recorded narrative, than Christ's showing Himself to His disciples at the Lake of Galilee. There is something pre-eminently open, natural, full fronting our disbelief, in this manifestation. The others, recorded after the Resurrection, were sudden, phantom-like, occurring to men in profound sorrow and wearied agitation of heart; not, it might seem, safe judges of what they saw. But the agitation was now over. They had gone back to their daily work, thinking still their business lay net-wards, unmeshed from the literal rope and drag. 'Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a-fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee.' True words enough, and having far echo beyond those Galilean hills. That night they caught nothing; but when the morning came, in the clear light of it, behold! a Figure

stood on the shore. They were not thinking of anything but their fruitless hauls. They had no guess who it was. It asked them simply if they had caught anything. They say, No; and it tells them to cast again. And John shades his eyes from the morning sun with his hands to look who it is; and though the glistening of the sea, too, dazzles him, he makes out who it is at last; and poor Simon, not to be outrun this time, tightens his fisher's-coat about him, and dashes in over the nets. One would have liked to see him swim those hundred yards, and stagger to his knees upon the beach.

"Well, the others get to the beach, too, in time, in such slow way as men in general do get in this world to its true shore, much impeded by that wonderful 'dragging the net with fishes'; but they get there—seven of them in all; first the denier, and then the slowest believer, and then the quickest believer, and then the two throne-seekers, and two more, we know not who.

"They sit down on the shore, face to face with Him, and eat their broiled fish as He bids. And then to Peter, all dripping still, shivering, and amazed, staring at Christ in the sun, on the other side of the coal-fire—thinking a little, perhaps, of what happened by another coal-fire, when it was colder, and having had no word changed with him by his Master since that look of His—to him so amazed, comes the question, 'Simon, lovest thou Me?' Try to feel that a little; and think of it till it is true to you."

"Try to feel that a little; and think of it till it is true to you." That is to say, there is something here

that witnesses to its own truth, and to the reality of the event which is described.

It is now becoming fashionable, even among believers in the reality of our Lord's reappearances to His disciples after the crucifixion, to discount the physical character of those reappearances, and to make them spiritual, phantasmal—anything but physical. The body of Jesus did not rise from the dead; it is still

> "Blown about the desert air,
> Or sealed within the iron hills"

of Palestine. The *spirit* of Jesus did truly and unmistakably reappear to His loved ones; and that is all we need to care about; that is all that is valueable for faith.

With every regard for the able and devout men who thus try to minimise and remove the difficulty which so many minds feel to-day in the way of accepting miracles, especially the supreme miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus, and with a deep sense of the responsibility of the words, I will venture to put the case thus—"Either there was a physical Resurrection, or there was no Resurrection at all." Christianity is built not on the reappearance in some ghost-like, phantasmal form of the Saviour who died on the Cross, *but on the Empty Tomb.* This is what separates and distinguishes the reappearances of Christ from those of Moses and Elias at the Transfiguration, or those of other dead people concerning whose momentary manifestation such strange stories are told from time to time—stories we dare not set aside as all foolish and fanciful. Jesus rose from the

dead, in the completeness of His person, physical as well as spiritual—or there was no Resurrection at all. His body rose as well as His spirit. That body was the same as He took into the tomb; the same, though so different—different as the "spiritual body" of which St Paul speaks of as the heritage of the Saints is different from the body of our "humiliation"—different, and yet the same. That difference is subtly suggested here in the wistful yearning of the disciples to ask a question of the awe-inspiring Figure before them in the grey dawn, "and none durst ask Him, Who art Thou?"; and the identity is seen in the inner core of certainty which underlay that touch of doubt—"Knowing that it was the Lord." It was the Master Himself, in the wholeness of His Personality, whose voice called across the waters, "Lads, have ye any fish?" and who prepared "the fire, and the fish laid thereon, and bread," and who, in the old familiar, loving way, saith unto them, "Come and dine."

II.

Looking more closely at the narrative, we can see, too, right through it all, a remarkable fidelity in the character-painting of the various individuals—the *dramatis personæ*—of the scene.

For instance, see how the various dispositions of the disciples reappear and stand out.

We see Simon Peter—energetic, impulsive, rest-

less, eager to lose his disappointment and intense anxiety to see his Master, in some manual labour. We see his hands itching to be at the old tasks, his mind in a fever of expectancy, and yet unable to stand the suspense. And Simon Peter said, "I go a-fishing!"

We see John, the well-beloved—the mystic; and we can imagine him joining a little unwilling in this fishing excursion. His heart was in other things just now; and through the night we can well believe that he was a little absent-minded in his work. But when that Voice comes from across the waters, "Lads, have ye any meat?" we can note a stirring of his heartstrings, a catch of the breath, a sudden, tense moment of concentration; and when again the Voice comes, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find," the tension is as suddenly released, light breaks on him in full radiance, and he cries to Peter—"It is the Lord." Full of significance, too, is the eager absorption of the other disciples in their sudden success; and the quick instinct of Peter, in his mingled awe and eagerness, to gird his fisher's-coat around him and to cast himself into the sea, that he might, without an instant's delay, put the beloved disciple's words to the test.

III.

But it is the self-revelation of Jesus that completes the argument, both as to the reality, and the significance of His last miracle-scene. This story might

have been written—as surely it was written—to show that the Jesus of the Resurrection was the same in nature as the Jesus of the old days before He had passed through the agony and the sacrament of death.

1. *His manner of working the miracle was characteristic.*

If you will run your mind along the story of the miracles of Jesus you will find ever this strange but suggestive feature in them—that they were no mere wonders, but purposive acts, each with a distinct place in the great scheme of revelation.

2. *They all had a definite relation to human need.*

They healed sickness, or relieved pain, or renewed broken ties, or rewarded unsuccessful effort; and always they enlarged and beautified the lives of those on whom they were wrought. The miracles of Jesus were a physical illustration of that great saying of His, "I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it abundantly." Picture the crowds bringing their maimed, blind, deaf, sick, their dead to Him. As they came—it was life spent, exhausted, abnormal, narrowed down to a point; as they departed—it was life enriched, restored to its fulness of vigour and grace, made young and glad.

> "O in what divers pains they met!
> O with what joy they went away!"

This is true of the spiritual miracles still and ever wrought by the Saviour on men's souls. "He doeth all things well, and maketh the blind to see, and the deaf to hear," was the verdict of the people of old. To how many souls since then has He been spiritually as eyes, and ears, and feet, and life!

3. *But you will find this too—that Jesus wrought no useless miracles.*

There was a divine economy about His method; He never showed His miraculous power till human power had failed, and only in so far as human power was helpless did He draw upon the supernatural reserves at His disposal.

For instance, He commands the man with the withered arm to "stretch forth" his arm, and in the act of stretching it forth it was healed. To the palsied man He says, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk," and in the effort of rising, power came to him. When He raised Lazarus from the dead, He commanded that the stone at the mouth of the tomb should be removed: as though He desired even the dead to have some share in his own resurrection, He said, "Lazarus, come forth"; and finally, He ordered those around to loose him from his grave-clothes and let him go free. Here again, He does not relieve the disciples of legitimate labour, tired as they must have been; He simply gave them the needful word, and left them to cast the net and draw it up to land, full of fishes great and small.

In this, again, there is a fine correspondence between the physical and the spiritual activities of Jesus. "Cast the net on the right side of the ship." He came to bring health, power of salvation to men; but He did not come to supplant the will or make effort needless, or slacken the native energies of the soul in its endeavour after a higher life. He will not do for us what we can do ourselves. He works for us, by working in us, and through us. In all our higher life, we are to be *co-workers* with Him. The

native resources of the soul are enlarged but not supplanted, quickened but not made superfluous, reinforced but not made needless. We have still to strive to enter in by the strait gate; we are to fight "not as those beating the air"; we are to "work out our own salvation in fear and trembling," for "it is God that worketh in us (not instead of us) both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Where our knowledge and power fail us, He will give us wisdom and victory; but only to those who do their utmost does divine grace come as a free gift to make up that which is lacking in them in the hour of their need.

4. *But the greatest revelation of the Risen Jesus which we have here is this—the manner in which this scene is linked with another which took place on the night of His betrayal.*

In some mysterious way, the Person of the Risen Lord before His Ascension was different from what it was in the days of His flesh. "And none durst ask Him Who art Thou, knowing it was the Lord."

How did they know it? Was it His movements, His intonation, His caressing gestures, the familiar way in which He joined them in their simple meal? He was ever glad to be with them so, and it was at the table that some of His most characteristic and precious sayings were said in the days of old. But there was more than that here.

"And when they had dined, Jesus said unto Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" What was this?

Go back to the dark betrayal night and consider a scene in the hall of Caiaphas. There by the fire you see a figure crouching, cowering, shivering with

mingled cold and terror, and yet putting on an air of bravado and nonchalance. We all know who it is, and how the bravest of the disciples has become a coward and a renegade. We remember, too, the way in which that scene ended—the cock-crowing, the thrust of conscience, the look that passed between Master and disciple, the quick and bitter repentance outside in the grey morning light. Perhaps we think that was the end of it all?

This scene is the completion, the climax, of that. Jesus here completes and ratifies the reconciliation that was then commenced. If this scene on the lake shore had not taken place, the after career of Simon Peter would have been one of uncertainty and torture to the end of his days. He might, indeed, have reasoned himself into the hope that Jesus had forgiven him. But that was not the Master's way; and I feel sure that this last scene was given in order that a beautiful instance might be given in the Gospel of a perfect act of repentance on the one side, and a perfect act of forgiveness on the other.

Repentance is not perfect in its fruit till it has had assurance of absolute reconciliation; forgiveness is not perfect till it has given that assurance. So here we find Peter eagerly and yet tremblingly hurrying to meet his Lord; and we find Jesus deliberately and formally completing the renewal of friendship and service betwixt Master and disciple. Here is the drama of pardon in its divine essentials: the sin, the repentance, carried as far as honest manifestation of it can go, on the one side; the sorrow and the forgiveness on the other side; both made clear in a way so delicate, so gentle, and yet so inexorable, that

there is nothing that can be suggested to make it more beautiful. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" . . . "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." . . . "Feed My lambs." Three times with subtlest inflection of words—inflections so subtle that even the resources of the flexible English language are utterly incapable of representing the felicitous delicacy of the Greek—three times is the question asked and answered. Then Master and disciple are once more knit in an indissoluble bond of love and loyalty, and to the end there is no more doubt or cloud of uncertainty to come between them.

Thus was "the glory of the Son" made manifest in this last revealing act; His innermost heart was unfolded in a beautiful outpouring of forgiving love and friendship. When Peter afterwards looked back at that terrible denial it was through the rose-tinted glow of that morning by the lake; and he would be filled with an unspeakable gratitude that an act so cowardly should have furnished the occasion for a love so divine. "This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to His disciples after that He was risen from the dead," and it "is written," like all that goes before, "that ye may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that, believing, ye may have life in His name."

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